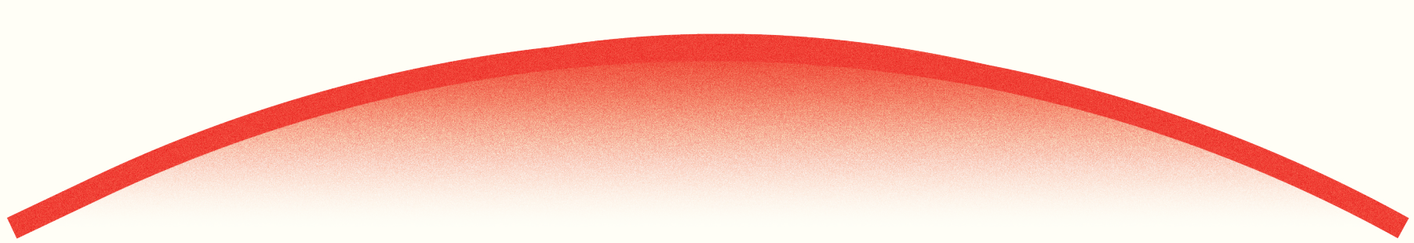

Letter From the Editor

Since the industrialization of the Western world, there has been a profound sense that everything is getting worse all of the time. Since at least Hobbes great thinkers both orthodox and fringe alike, have observed humanity's restlessness with the environment it finds itself in. However, there is a uniqueness to each period's anxiety as evidenced by the record it leaves behind. Ours for better or worse seems to be an era of homogeneity, of superficial difference but underlined by a hopelessly inescapable sameness. Everywhere you look everything appears to be the same and no one can design any alternatives. Socially, politically, aesthetically, and so on the space in between where we could carve ourselves out a home and did so for hundreds of years is increasingly being paved over by our corporations and governments, and spaces of transient impermanent stucco are erected in their stead.

Our culture has become identical disposable plastic waste floating in the ocean and the artefacts we are creating are the literal and philosophical equivalent of trash. Our oceans and our blood are now full of polyethylene as we slowly suffocate to death. We increasingly cannot think ourselves out of the waking hell that has been created for us nor can we see with our own eyes those responsible to hold them to account. As if we are all fish in a tank, unable to perceive an alternative outside of our present reality.

In a time like this, it is easy to give into despair, to roll over and die as our cities burn and crumble into dust. To concede any hope and cling to the bare life that still exists. Indeed as we've seen over the last 3 years many of us did just that. However, somehow despite all of this the world keeps going and there are those who are still creating great things, imposing their own will onto the world, and implementing a version of their reality. This is what the Vision of the Future project is.

Originally conceived as a kind of personal archive, a place to park design references and inspirational stimuli- discovered over the last 10 years- it has grown out of digital design from the late 1990s and early 2000s. This by my estimation was the last period of time where culture imagined a future worth looking forward to and this shows in the era's design. Metallics, bright colors, futuristic applications of materials, and an unbridled utopianism.

Since then, *Vision of the Future* has evolved into what all collections of artefacts should eventually become, a design practice of its own. Design research should inform a design practice and that design practice should offer a positive vision of the future.

Collecting objects of cultural capital that sit and collect dust in a bedroom is a pointless endeavor as design (as with fashion) is only given meaning by its real-world application. These things must be shared and used to inspire further creation. If there are still people capable of thinking outside the constraints placed upon them by the various relationships and structures they find themselves in, we must study and emulate their frameworks rather than merely copy their ideas. *Vision of The Future* explores these digital nomads acting as a bulwark against the present despair and a reminder of what is still possible to do today.

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01. MATERIAL CULTURE

Materiality, texture, tactile sensation, these are the words marketers use to sell the masses luxury goods. Material culture encompasses all aspects of design as it is contextualized within a set of broader systems. From the bespoke leather of Bottega to the mass produced plasticity of MUJI, Dollarama and Walmart. We are a material culture, materialist in so many ways yet ironically lacking in the tangible particular ways it matters.

Design culture, subjected to the fashions and whims of the times, finds itself in all objects, from the mundane and everyday to the rare collectables. Our time is defined by the tradition of planned obsolescence and our elder's death grip on democratic reform in and of itself, clinging to their priors refusing to step aside or down. Then the millennials so lost and confused in the wake of the previous generation's nihilism, creating rules for their ruthless hyper-competitions.

Our time, yes, our time's fashion defined by Virgil, Demna and Michele. Our buildings by Hadid, Koolhaas, Gehry, and the rest of the dinosaurs. Here you'll find the essence, the phenomenon of our time as mediated through the practice of design.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Chapter

OBJECT STUDY

21 objects for everyday life

Photography by
Joseph Gleasure

Because life is too short to own ugly things.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Photography

Moe, the term for feelings of strong affection; Fuku, the noun for 'good luck'. Akabeko a symbol of luck, an idol to ward off sickness and plague.

A deceptive design by a Japanese industrialist, resembling the Italians who refused advertising and the English who hid in their gardens.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Photography

Austere and subtle, silver lends itself to understated aesthetic representations. This in conjuction with the unprecendted, interest in fashion by heterosexual males, has propelled it to the forefront of accessory design.

Tokujin Yoshioka is himself when working with glass, the material lends itself to transition, and demarcating boundaries between states and dimensions.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Photography

A thoughtful blend of material relating to size, shape, form and texture. The folds of the nylon refract light like diamonds.

Deconstruction used to be the realm of the D.I.Y. or the frugal. Now, the mass market reflects the decay of our inert systems in their products.

A radical representation of suburban life, not of the banal, but finding beauty in the mundane of the everyday.

The legendary typography publication from UCLA that changed the world and influenced a certain Elliott Earls. His work is feaured in this issue from 1995 as he went on to run Cranbrook's 2-D Graduate Program in 2001.

Photography

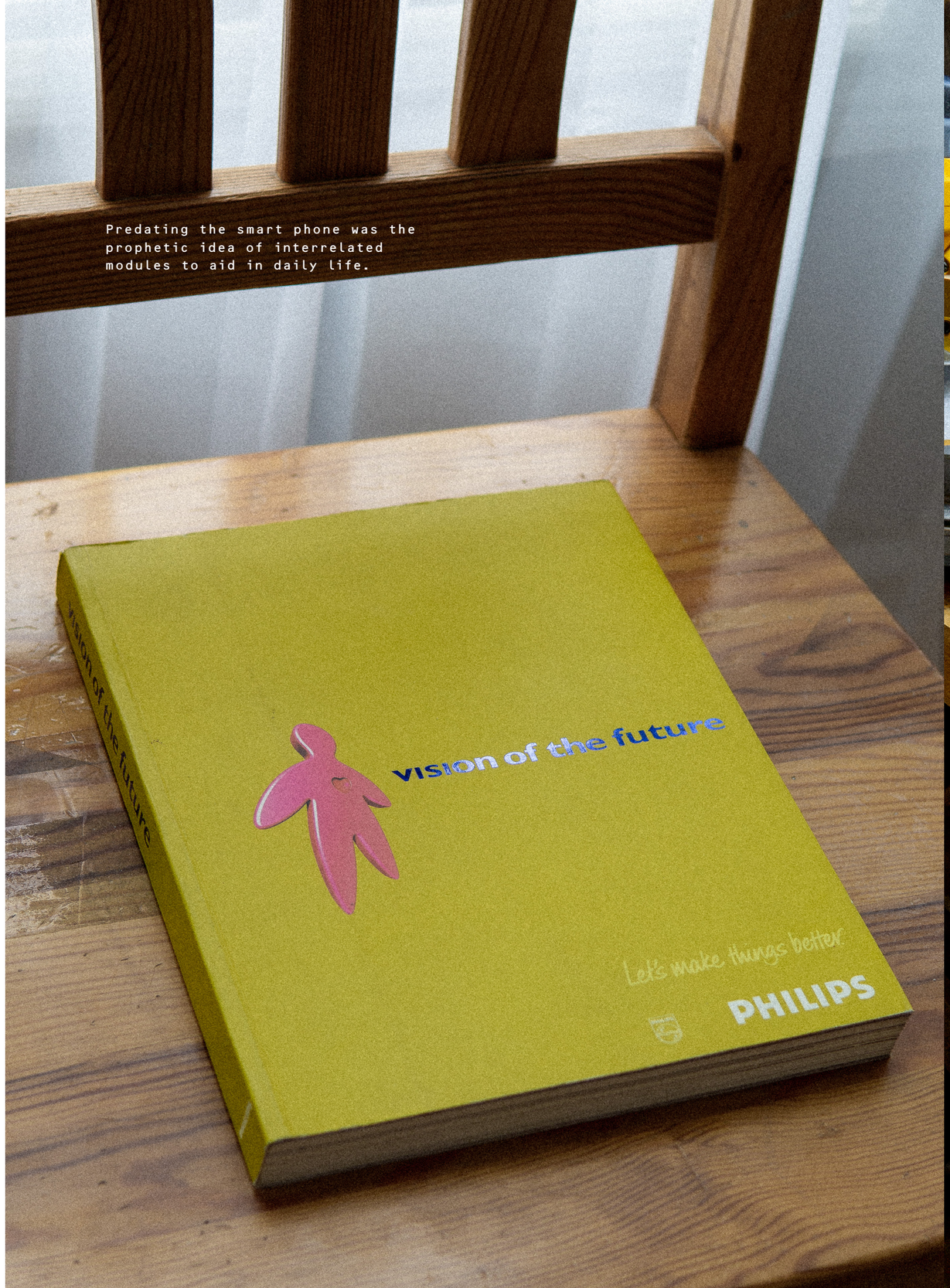
A reintepretation of the MA-1 jacket, transformed into a new garment entirely.

A legendary factory in Japan that made better American guitars than the Americans.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Photography

Predating the smart phone was the prophetic idea of interrelated modules to aid in daily life.



"Dreams will not rust", a 20th century breakthrough that persists to the present day.

Everything today is imbued with
a business ontology-take this
book for example- that has
now become a collector's item
worth hundreds of dollars.

A revolutionary format by
a revolutionary publisher.
Digital Multimedia publications
from a bygone era.

Naoto Fukasawa posits that objects shouldn't stand out too much. they should perform their function within the entire existence of space and other objects.

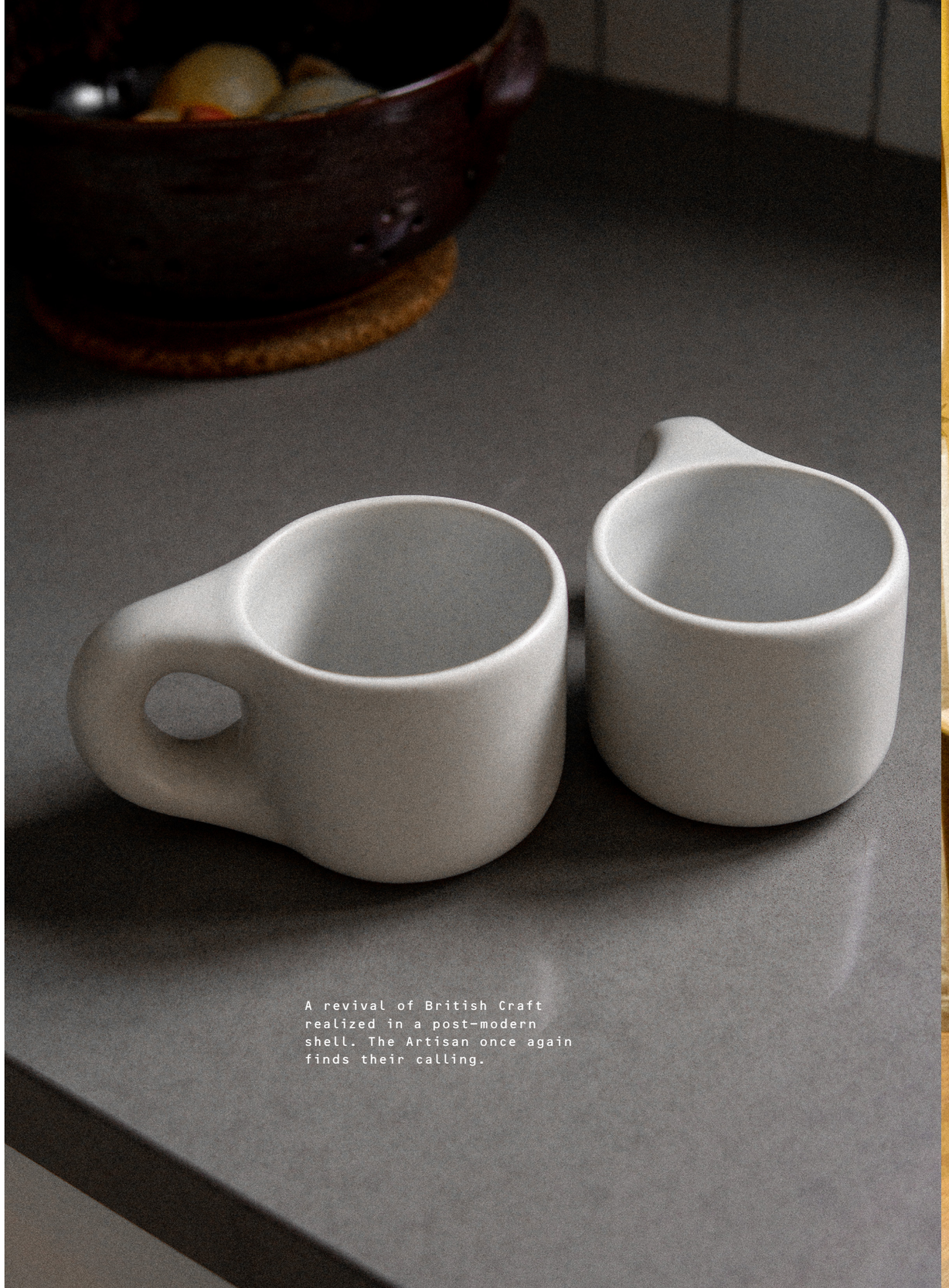
A simple form, dedication to the old way of doing things. Protected oak, contemporary design.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Photography

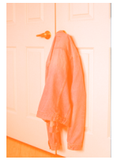
The constant and continual apropriation of militaria for civillian use, first realized by Martin Margiela

A bittersweet visual reminder of what Canada once offered its citizens. Now only conceivable through printed image.

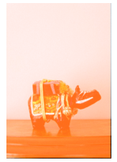


A revival of British Craft realized in a post-modern shell. The Artisan once again finds their calling.

The peak of Hi-Fi audio brought professional grade equipment and crystal clear sound into the everyman's home.



Helmut Lang
A/W 1998
Denim Jacket



Unknown
C. 2020
'Akabeko'

Takeo Kikuchi
2019
Back-zip Boots

Various
Various
.925 Silver Rings

Tokujin Yoshioka
2017
Glass Watch for Issey Miyake

Facetasm
2018
Camo-mix Bomber

New Balance
2022
M2002R Sneakers

Takashi Homma
2000
Tokyo Suburbia

Emigre
1995
#35 Mouthpiece

Facetasm
2017
MA-1 Remake Pants

Fender Fujigen
1985
'NGE' Stratocaster

Philips Electronics
1996
Vision of The Future

Toyo Steel
2022
ST-350 Toolbox

IDEA & The
Designer's Republic
2001
SP01

Gasbook
Various
Various Issues

Zebra
2022
F-701

Christophe Delcourt
2015
Monceau Table Lamp

Bundswehr
1980s
Army Trainers

National Film Board of Canada
1967
Canada: A year of the land

Faye Toogood
2022
Dough cups

Sony
1982
PS-3750, TA-2650

The 21 items featured here are design objects from various fields belonging to the author. Rather than rotting under dim UV light they have been showcased as an antidote to malaise. They are of great personal significance and are foremost examples of the joy beautiful things can bring to a person and the radical potential of design.

To the chagrin of the would-be dissidents, design is unlikely to bring about the kind of ‘radicalism’ they support. There is no coming revolution or societal upheaval; the ‘professional activist’s’ impotent flailing is nothing more than Bordiga’s description: a blood infection requiring constant treatment (1952). Their theories on the organization of society are obsolete at best and horrifically misanthropic at worst. No matter their prescriptions on the political importance of art and design their roads lead back to Rome.

The ’radicalism’ design instead offers us, and good design especially, is our only consolation. That is, it offers us the chance to continue our imagination. Paglia wrote “Nature has a master agenda we can only dimly know”(2018), and we cannot fight specters that no longer exist. Design can keep alight the desires and hopes we require to realize some change in the order of things that lies beyond the horizon.

WHERE + ARE

VIRGIL'S DEAD

WE NOW?

The advent of the widespread usage of AI and CHATGPT in everyday life forced the general public into confronting what the philosopher had long been grappling with.

The resulting epistemological crises that followed, that is – the loss of faith in faith itself – has been utterly catastrophic.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Op–ed

VIRGIL'S DEAD

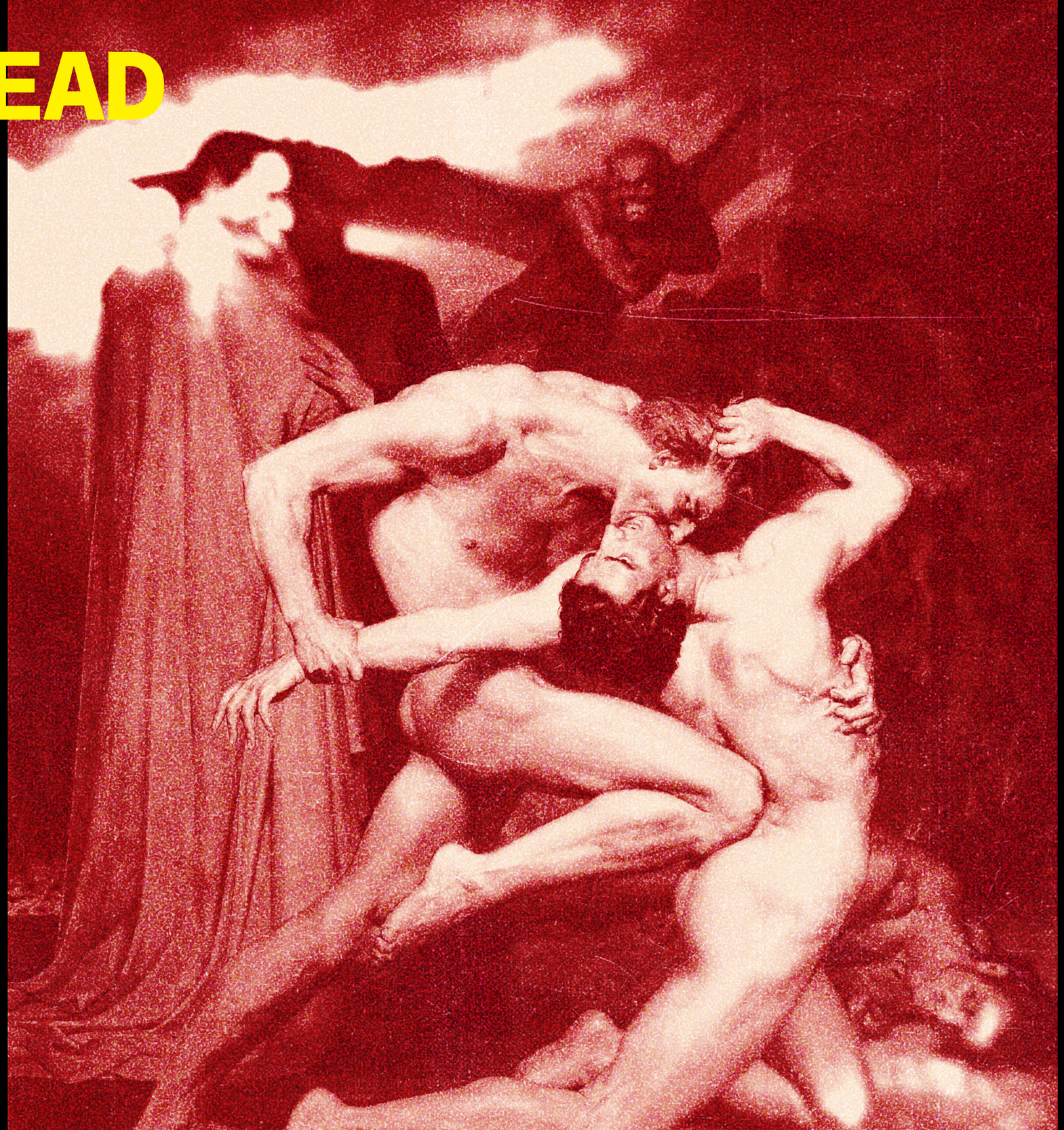
MSCHF, Intellectual Property, Consumerism, Capitalism, Fashion

Words by CHATGPT3.5 & Joseph Gleasure
Design by Joseph Gleasure

Painting by William-Adolphe Bouguereau

There is no designer more emblematic of the 2010s than Virgil Abloh, his work itself a facsimile of design, his lectures an ode to the charlatan. As we've come to worship simulation, we've forgotten that the soul cannot discern irony. A novel technology to express this sentiment. What Abloh's tenuous design work tells us about our time is damning yet obliterating in it's totality. How is it that the repetition of ideas has such a stranglehold on us? And what will each subsequent generation hold up as artefacts of our material culture?

The rise of Virgil Abloh and MSCHF in the fashion and art world has brought attention to the role of communication and medium in shaping contemporary culture. As McLuhan famously stated, "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 7), and both Abloh and MSCHF's use of mediums such as fashion and internet sensations to convey their messages raises important questions about the nature of communication and the proliferation of kitsch in our consumer society. Baudrillard's (1994) theories on simulation and hyperreality also come into play as the line between reality and artifice becomes increasingly blurred. Meanwhile, Havelock's (1963a) ideas on the medium forming the way a society can express itself highlights the role of these mediums in shaping our cultural expression. This essay will critically examine the work and influence of Abloh and MSCHF through the lens of these theories, exploring the impact of their mediums on our understanding of history, consumerism, and culture.



VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking
Op-ed

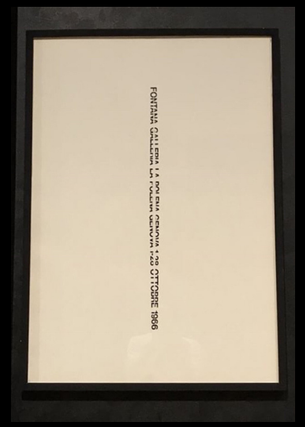
Firstly, we must understand whom we are dealing with in our simulated environment. Virgil Abloh is a fashion designer, artist, and DJ who rose to fame as the artistic director of Louis Vuitton's men's wear line. He is also the founder and CEO of the streetwear label Off-White. Abloh's designs often incorporate elements of streetwear, luxury fashion, and pop culture, and he has been credited with popularizing the "luxury streetwear" trend (Caban & Long, 2019). He is considered a highly influential figure in style and has been recognized with numerous awards and accolades (Caban & Long, 2019).

MSCHF is a Brooklyn-based art collective that creates viral internet sensations. They are known for using shock and controversy to gain attention, often using iconic symbols and motifs from the past in their creations (Forbes, 2021). MSCHF's work is often described as "internet-native art," and their projects have been featured in many publications, including The New York Times (Kelly, 2021), Vice (Smith, 2021), and Forbes (Forbes, 2021). They have been described as a collective of "post-internet" artists and have been known for their highly viral projects such as the "Jesus Shoes" and the "IKEA Satan" (Smith, 2021). MSCHF's approach to creating viral internet sensations often uses consumer products as mediums and their way of manipulating them to create a different meaning (Smith, 2021).

Examining the work of Virgil Abloh through the lens of Jean Baudrillard's theories on simulation shows that Abloh's highly commercialized and hyper-branded approach to fashion design exemplifies the concept of the "simulacrum," in which the copy becomes more important than the original, and the distinction between reality and representation becomes blurred (Baudrillard, 1994). By examining how Abloh's work manipulates and commodifies cultural symbols and signifiers, we will argue that his designs ultimately serve to reinforce dominant capitalist ideologies rather than subverting or challenging them. Through this analysis, we hope to shed light on the broader social and cultural implications of Abloh's work and the role of fashion within our society.

Baudrillard believed modern society is characterized by the loss of history (Baudrillard, 1981), as the past is constantly being erased and replaced by new and superficial images. In this sense, Abloh's work can be seen as a perfect example of the loss of history in fashion. His designs often appropriate and repurpose iconic symbols and motifs from the past, such as the diagonal stripes and quotation marks that are a hallmark of Off-White. Still, they do so in a way that is superficial and lacks any deeper meaning or context. This can be seen as erasing the history and cultural significance of these symbols and replacing them with new and shallow images solely for consumption.

Louis Vuitton S/S 2022



Lucio Fontana 1966 Exhibition Poster

Off White A/W 2016

COLRS A/W 2018

Off White A/W 2019

In his work, Abloh's designs can be seen as reflecting Baudrillardian concepts such as the proliferation of kitsch (Baudrillard, 1981). Baudrillard defined kitsch as the use of sentimental or melodramatic images that evoke emotions but have no real meaning, and this can be seen in Abloh's bold and eye-catching graphics and text that lack any natural substance (Baudrillard, 1981). Abloh's designs are also prime examples of Baudrillard's idea of a consumer society, where people are defined by the things they own and consume (Baudrillard, 1981). In Abloh's case, his designs are highly sought after by consumers and are often viewed as status symbols (Baudrillard, 1981).

Additionally, Abloh's work reflects Baudrillard's concept of simulation, where in the postmodern world, reality is replaced by simulations that lack any original or authentic meaning (Baudrillard, 1983). Many of Abloh's designs can be seen as simulations of existing styles and trends in fashion, but they lack any of the original meaning or context (Baudrillard, 1983). This can be seen in Abloh's use of quotation marks and diagonal stripes, which is an apparent reference to the work of Barbara Kruger (Baudrillard, 1983).

Finally, Abloh's designs can be seen as an example of Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality, where the distinction between reality and simulation is blurred (Baudrillard, 1994). Abloh's designs often blur the line between high fashion and streetwear, making it difficult to tell whether his work is an authentic expression of personal style or just a clever manipulation of existing trends and symbols (Baudrillard, 1994). This creates a form of hyperreality where it is difficult to discern the reality of Abloh's designs and whether they are truly original or just cleverly crafted simulations (Baudrillard, 1994).

Furthermore, McLuhan's theory of the medium being the message (McLuhan, 1964) can be applied to Abloh's designs and how they communicate. Abloh often uses bold and striking graphics and text in his designs, which are meant to grab attention and make a statement. However, the medium in which these designs are presented, such as high-end luxury streetwear, can be seen as the actual message. The expensive price tag and exclusivity of these designs communicate a message of elitism and exclusivity rather than inclusivity and accessibility. This can be seen as a form of manipulation, as the medium of luxury fashion is used to convey a message that is at odds with the supposed message of the designs themselves.

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Nr. 1 - Design thinking

Op-ed

Havelock's ideas on the medium forming the way a society expresses itself (Havelock, 1963b) can also be applied to Abloh's work. Havelock believed that the communication medium shapes how a community expresses itself and its ideas. In the case of Abloh, his designs often appropriate and repurpose iconic symbols and motifs from the past, but they do so in a superficial way and lack any deeper meaning or context. This can be seen as a form of manipulation, as the medium of fashion is used to express shallow and superficial ideas rather than more meaningful and nuanced ideas.

Furthermore, Abloh's designs can be seen as an example of how the medium of fashion can be used to distract people from more important issues. McLuhan's theory of the medium being the message (McLuhan, 1964) can be applied here, as the medium of fashion distracts people from more pressing issues and concerns. By making people focus on the superficial and shallow aspects of style, Abloh's designs can be seen as a way of diverting attention away from more critical issues, such as poverty, inequality, and political corruption.

Additionally, Abloh's designs can be seen as an example of how the medium of fashion can be used to create a false sense of identity. Havelock's ideas on the medium forming the way a society expresses itself can be applied here, as the medium of fashion is used to create a false sense of identity. By making people focus on the superficial and shallow aspects of style, Abloh's designs can be seen as a way of creating a false sense of identity and self-worth rather than encouraging people to explore and express their true selves (Havelock, n.d.).

Havelock's ideas on the medium forming the way a society expresses itself can be applied to MSCHF's approach to creating viral internet sensations. The medium of the internet allows MSCHF to spread their ideas and creations quickly and widely, but the content they produce often needs more depth and meaning. This can be seen as a medium manipulation, as the internet is used to express shallow and superficial ideas rather than more meaningful and nuanced ones (Havelock, n.d.).

JESUS SHOE, MSCHF

Guns 2 Swords, MSCHF
Photography by Jeff Kravitz
for Getty Images

SATAN SHOE, MSCHF

BIG RED BOOT, MSCHF

McLuhan's theory of the medium being the message can also be applied to MSCHF's internet use. The medium of the internet allows MSCHF to create viral sensations that grab attention and make a statement, but the medium itself can be seen as the actual message. The use of shock and controversy as a means of getting attention can be seen as a manipulation of the medium of the internet to spread a message that is at odds with the supposed message of the content (McLuhan, 1964).

Baudrillard's theory of the proliferation of kitsch can be applied to MSCHF's approach to creating viral internet sensations. The use of shock and controversy to get attention can be seen as a form of kitsch, as it lacks any deeper meaning or context (Baudrillard, 1981). This can be seen as a manipulation of the medium of the internet to spread shallow ideas rather than more meaningful and nuanced ones (Baudrillard, 1981).

Baudrillard's theory of the loss of history can also be applied to MSCHF's approach to creating viral internet sensations. The use of iconic symbols and motifs from the past in their creations can be seen as a form of manipulation, as they are used in a superficial and shallow way that lacks any deeper meaning or context (Baudrillard, 1992). This can be seen as a manipulation of the medium of the internet to spread shallow and superficial ideas rather than more meaningful and nuanced ones (Baudrillard, 1992).

VOTF
Nr. 1 - Design thinking

Op-ed

Baudrillard's theory of simulation can also be applied to MSCHF's approach to creating viral internet sensations. The use of shock and controversy to get attention can be seen as a form of simulation, as it is meant to develop a sense of reality that is not truly there (Baudrillard, 1981). This can be seen as a manipulation of the medium of the internet to make a false sense of reality and distract people from more important issues and concerns (Baudrillard, 1981).

In conclusion, Virgil Abloh and MSCHF's use of mediums such as fashion and internet sensations are not only shallow but also damaging to our understanding of history, culture, and consumerism. They have contributed to the proliferation of kitsch in our consumer society (Baudrillard, 1981) and their manipulation of mediums for shock value and viral success is nothing but a cheap tactic for getting attention (Baudrillard, 1981) Both Abloh and MSCHF have demonstrated a need for greater understanding of the power of mediums and their impact on our culture (McLuhan, 1964). McLuhan's theory of "the medium is the message" (1964) highlights the importance of the mediums we use to communicate. Evidently, Abloh and MSCHF have yet to use theirs responsibly (Baudrillard, 1981) Baudrillard's ideas on simulation and hyperreality (1981) also come into play as the line between reality and artifice becomes increasingly blurred. The work of these two entities is a prime example of that. Meanwhile, Havelock's ideas on the medium forming the way a society can express itself (1963b) highlight these mediums' role in shaping our cultural expression and how Abloh and MSCHF's mediums still need to do so. It is essential to examine the mediums that shape our society and the messages they convey to understand their impact on our culture and our understanding of the world.

The preceding article was compiled in ChatGPT 3.5 between January and February 2023.

No one should ever waste their cognitive faculties writing about Virgil Abloh.

Virgil Abloh in a UNABOMBER T-shirt

ON BALENCIAGA SPRING 2023

Demna, Conspiracy Theories, Politics, Fashion, Borges

Words by: Joseph Gleasure

Photography by Gabriele Galimberti

If Virgil is a signifier of the decay of the Apollonian, then surely Demna is the Dionysian. In dreams and intoxication working in tandem to deteriorate our material culture. Fashion is to design what the avant-garde is to art. When the incurious experts stop asking questions, isn't it only natural for conspiracy to reign supreme?

By now, the fanfare will have died down, but back in late November 2022, Balenciaga released a series of images (Balenciaga,2022) shot by Gabriele Galimberti an Italian photographer famed for such projects as The Ameriguns (more on this later). Almost immediately after the images appeared online, Balenciaga and Galimberti found themselves in the middle of a significant controversy for some of the props used in the set design of the editorial. Teddy bears in gimp costumes and BDSM fetish gear, locks around their necks, and fishnet shirts. The stuffed animals were apparently showcasing items from Balenciaga's object line which were then displayed next to child models some of whom also were wearing locks.

Among, the strange but seemingly harmless images were a series of documents and artbooks strewn about the set which appeared in both the children's collections and the men's and womenswear collection photos. In addition to the documents and books, the adult models were seen wearing keys, presumably to correspond with the locks on the children and teddy bears. Some clever internet sleuths (Tweet with replies, 2022) were able to confirm that the documents came from high- profile legal cases involving human trafficking and child pornography, specifically a case that loosened the law around child pornography in the United States. One of the art books was from Belgian artist Michaël Borremans and his exhibit Fire From The Sun which utilized 18th-century painting techniques to create works that were described as featuring "toddlers engaged in playful but mysterious acts with sinister overtones and insinuations of violence" (Michaël Borremans: Fire from the Sun | David Zwirner, 2022). It's worth noting that Borremans' earlier works which are arguably equally sinister although do not feature children, were applied as all-over prints to Jun Takahashi's Undercover womenswear collection for Autumn-Winter 2016 without significant ontroversy (Phelps,2016).

Photography by Eddie Hu for Huiben

Almost immediately, the internet at large descended into outrage flooding Balenciaga's social media pages, harassing key brand ambassadors like Kim Kardashian(Cole,2022), starting several viral Twitter threads, and posting viral TikTok's about the collection (Tweet with replies, 2022. The photos were undeniably strange, and the masses were demanding some explanation. What Demna Gvaslia eventually provided satisfied no one and just added more confusion to the already surreal incident. Demna threw his creative team under the bus claiming that it was the photographer he hired who had provided the props - a charge that Galimberti was swift to address and deny (Cochrane,2022),but what was even odder was Demna either didn't seem to understand the point of contention with his editorial or was deliberately ignoring it in a classic PR move. His statement focused on the teddy bears and the BDSM imagery rather than the documents about sex crimes or the children wearing locks. Even stranger was the fashion industry's complete unwillingness to acknowledge that anything strange had happened at all.

In quite the reversal from the 90's fashion media which seemed to thrive on controversy as they continually attacked designers like Rei Kawakubo, Alexander McQueen, Martin Margiela, and John Galliano (Hume,1995) during the middle part of the decade for the most minor of aesthetic transgressions refused to cover the Balenciaga story; it was as if the mere mention of it was too low status to acknowledge. High-Snobiety a low-status periodical and website that mainly reports on streetwear and sneaker news was one of the few outlets to even mention it (Highsnobeity,2022). However, their initial article was focused on policing the borders of discourse surrounding the incident (they later corrected the record by acknowledging the content of the photographs, by that point the damage was already done) by attempting to smear a twitter personality for having the audacity to voice concerns about the collection (Tweet with replies, 2022), the same concerns that hundreds of thousands of internet users also had. By painting the controversy as a conspiracy theory or more insidiously as 'denial' of reality High Snobiety was effectively shutting down any conversation surrounding the images.

Michael Borremans Black Mould, 2015

VOTF
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Op-ed

It was almost as if in the wake of cases like Jeffery Epstein & Prince Andrew combined with the general fog of malaise that has encumbered all of society since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic paralyzed our cultural elites. Being confronted with the potential of the greatest evils imaginable manifested itself as a sort of short-circuiting, they simply don't know how to respond, a kind of vertigo if you will. While it's tempting to give into conspiratorial thinking here whether this was a warning, a confession, or a poorly thought our marketing decision remains to be seen even today.

The object-level phenomena going on here is largely unimportant; it is incredibly unlikely that Balenciaga is secretly a cabal of human traffickers and dwelling on that is largely uninteresting and unimportant. What is fascinating is how the general public reacted in conjunction with the fashion industry's non-reaction. What this duality represents is western culture's apparent nervous breakdown that has occurred over the last 3 years or so during the Pandemic, the limiting effect literacy or rather partial literacy is having on communication, status, or class anxiety and the mass acceptance of conspiratorial thinking. The nervous breakdown of society and mass conspiratorial thinking is best described through the concept of Borgesian vertigo – that the world presents itself as a great rabbit hole with no bottom (De Lailhacar,1988). That the reader of Borges, or in this case the citizen of the western world who follows the news religiously, is in very real danger of harming themselves through endless consumption of info hazards. It's an important concept not only because the Balenciaga hysteria is a clear example of it, but also because it appears similarly in other strata.

"the world presents itself as a great rabbit hole with no bottom"

Joseph Conrad spoke of teetering on the precipice and having the void stare back at You(2017), but how many of us are the special man like Kurtz who can withstand the crushing ominous weight of being seen? How many of us would succumb and fall into the abyss? Conversely, Baudrillard once said he had to stop working on simulation theory because it started to rebound on him in strange ways becoming trapped in his own thoughts. In another more humorous fragment, Baudrillard claims to have read a story about a character who has a heart attack and shortly after he also had a heart attack(Heghoulian, 2023). This is not meant to be so mystical and wander off into the metaphysics of manifestation, but this power of suggestion we can impose upon ourselves shows up in often unexpected and serendipitous ways. This of course is not to suggest that reading about health issues will incur a health issue in the reader, but that we can often trap ourselves inside our own thoughts and it will lead to negative outcomes. That Baudrillard attributed his heart attack to having read about another person having a heart attack demonstrates the danger of this species of vertigo.

Photography by Gabriele Galimberti

This trap we lay for ourselves is compounded very simply by the way our forms of communication work, we are increasingly becoming a visual culture that translates images and signs from words (themselves strings of symbols that denote meaning). Approximately 40% of Canadians are estimated to be functionally illiterate based on which studies you chose to believe, but the fact that 40% even seems plausible is a worrying sign(CBC Radio,2021) .While being illiterate is not the be-all and end-all of a culture it does have complications on our communication. Havelock and McLuhan have at various points, spoken on modes of communication limiting and extending cultures' thinking. McLuhan with the 20th century West(1964) and Havelock examined Homeric thinking in ancient Greece(Havelock,1963). Essentially the Greeks were an oral culture that communicated through poetry and thus the way they were able to conceive thoughts and ideas was directly moulded by that medium.

What then does this tell us about a partially literate culture that relies on signs and symbols to communicate meaning? What happens when a culture experiences a nervous breakdown on a civilizational level? What happens if it becomes paranoid and anxious? In a direct way, we see extensive shadowboxing and partial recognition of signs that we then try and fit into our own fears and anxieties.

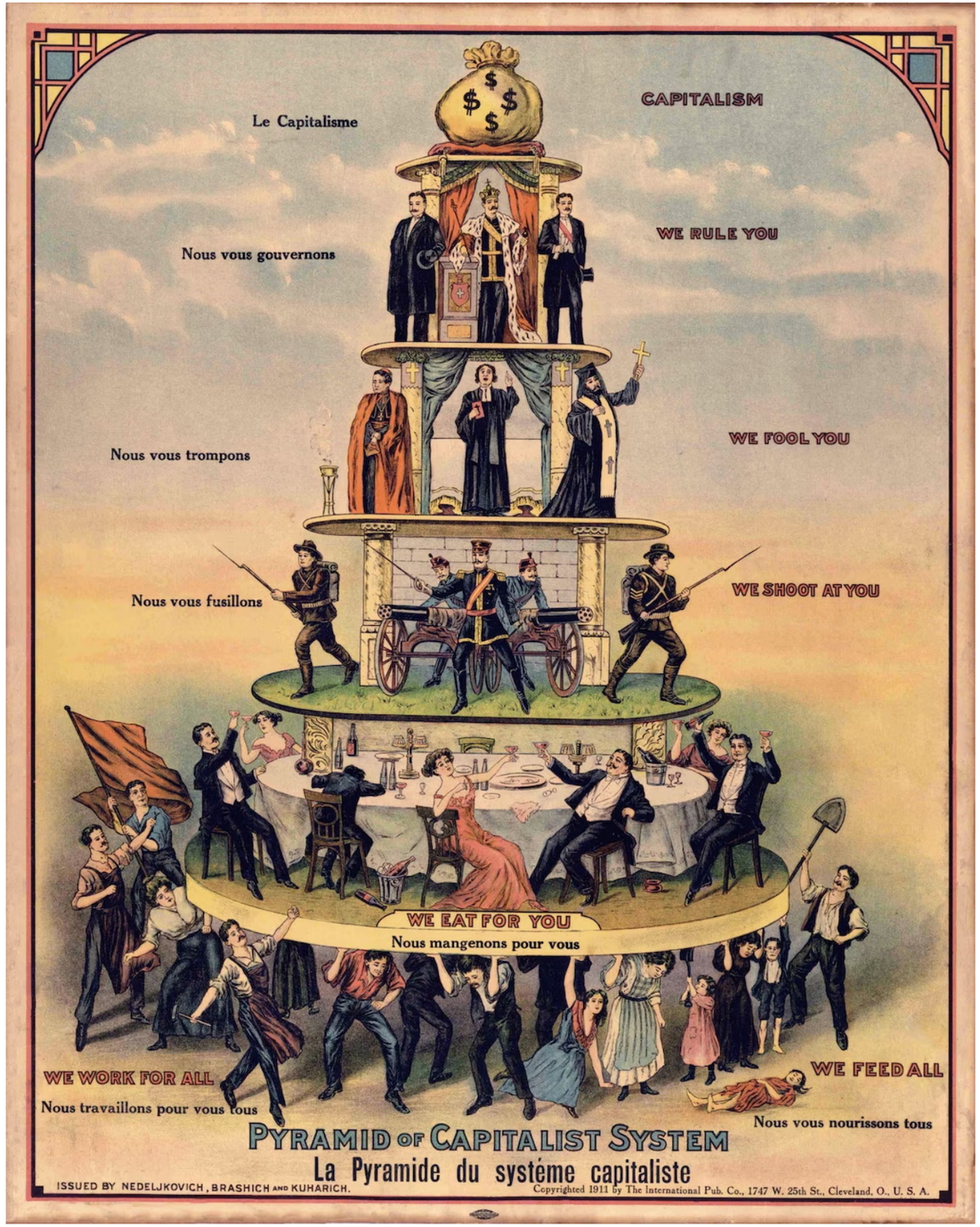
Some wealthy and powerful people have been convicted of child sex crimes, the world of the rich and powerful is largely closed off to those who aren't a part of it, and our culture is increasingly

"What happens when a culture experiences a nervous breakdown on a civilizational level?"

paranoid. Semi-official conspiracies: JFK, 9/11, MKULTRA, COINTELPRO(Cahn, 2019) in addition to high status signaling that operates along identical logic as conspiracies: Patriarchy, White Supremacy, privilege and the increasing litany of identity politics that have zero explanatory power whatsoever contribute to the creation of a culture wherein a strange image of a child becomes absolute evidence that a crime has taken place. Certain stimuli have been introduced that produced a specific effect in the viewer based on inferences the viewer created themselves based upon the culture and circumstances they find themselves in.

The questions that remain are why then does only a certain demographic and class of people care about these strange and disturbing issues? Why did the fashion industry not respond? And was this a deliberately constructed reaction or sheer ignorance on the part of Balenciaga? This is more an issue of reputation management and anxiety related to class and status. The fashion industry is full of wealthy people with impressive educations in the arts; they know who artists like Borremans are and are generally more art-literate than the public. They understand that Borremans is not glorifying child abuse in his paintings because of the culture and circumstances they find themselves in. For the powerful, this conspiracy looks ridiculous on its face. Even if they could understand the masses' motivations and circumstances, they still wouldn't acknowledge it because to acknowledge it is to legitimize it tacitly. Demna, Galimberti, and Kim Kardashian had to say something because their social media profiles were being barraged by millions of comments, they simply had no option . After all,when a beehive breaks, would you cover yourself in honey?

Another aspect of this barrage of hatred Balenciaga received is related to class anxieties, there is a belief that persists that those who aren't rich, who aren't intelligent, or otherwise gifted have some kind of moral failing(Levitt, 2022), but in the 21st century, this idea now goes both ways. "I am not rich because I refuse to exploit my fellow workers" says the communist, "I didn't get the promotion because I'm good to my people and not cutthroat enough" says the middle manager, and I have heard on more than one occasion the highly humorous phrase "rich people are people too". What is meant here is, generally speaking, there is an axe to grind with the wealthy and powerful born out of insecurity of one own's class position (of course there are legitimate criticisms of the rich, but if you are baselessly accusing them of pedophilia it seems likely that this is insecurity and resentment) and one of the most obvious instantiations of the rich and powerful are luxury brands. When such controversies arise as in the case of Balenciaga these people come of out of the woodwork. In turn the rich and powerful i.e. the fashion industry, tries to ignore them as long as possible.



The Pyramid of Capitalist System. 1911

The Ameriguns, 2020, Gabriele Galimberti

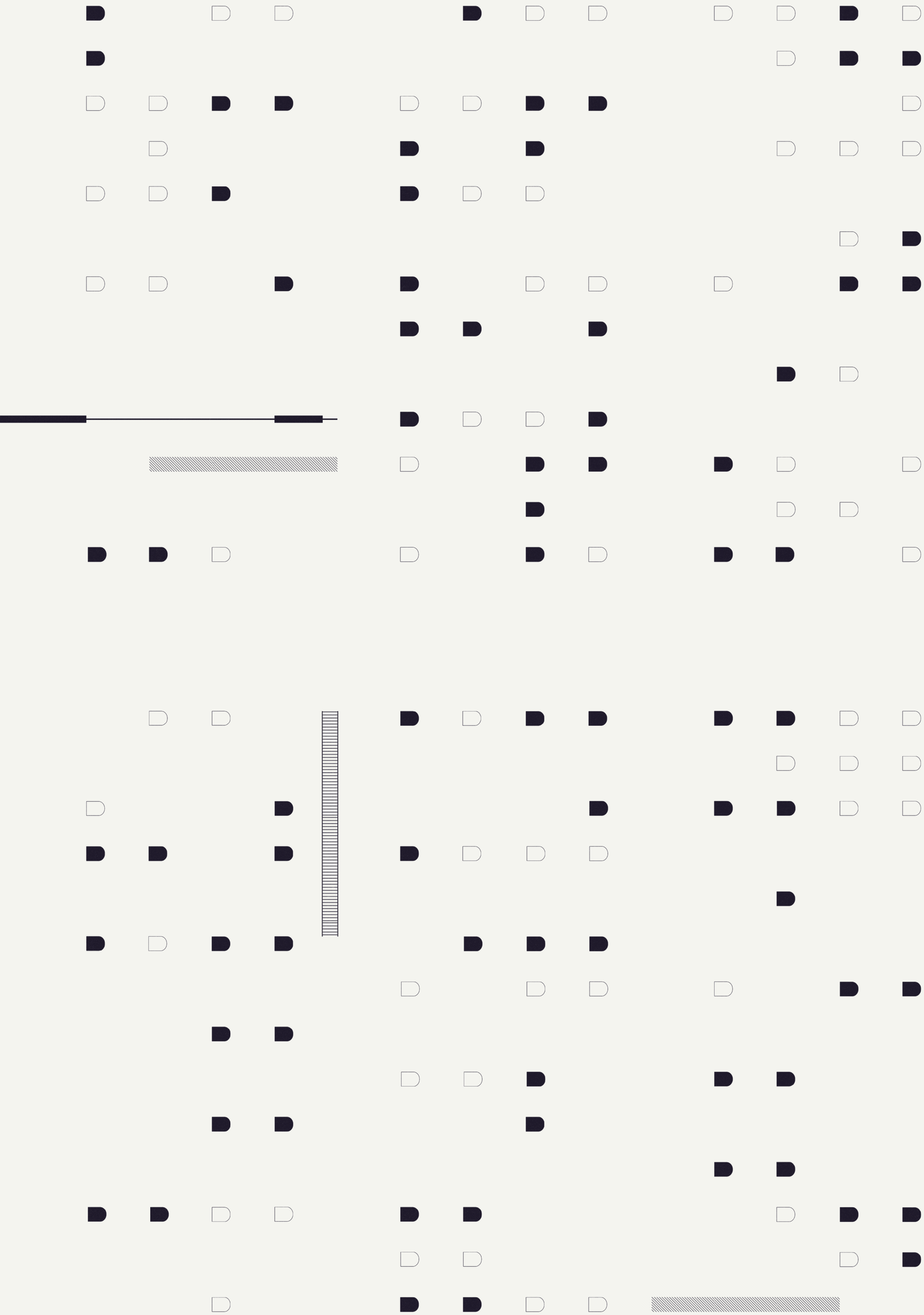
“the problem...is that the images look more like advertisements than condemnations”

If Balenciaga are not involved in the human trafficking of children and the masses are simply acting on class resentment and reflexively jumping on symbols, what does the collection mean then? Why did Balenciaga decide to incorporate child sex crime documents as props? Based on the creative time involved it is likely that Balenciaga is masterfully taking advantage of the cultural zeitgeist I have laid out above. We exist in a world that is paranoid, anxious, confused, and in the middle of a legitimacy crisis itself, it is the perfect breeding ground for conspiracy. Balenciaga’s Lotta Volkova understands how to leverage real-world conditions perhaps better than anyone in the fashion industry today. A native Russian, she often engages in blasphemy by wearing satanic imagery in old cathedrals thereby pushing the boundaries of acceptability in her own country (LOTTA,2022). Additionally, she has played fast and loose within the art and fashion world itself, having been accused of plagiarism and exploring taboo visual styles and aesthetics for her entire career. If there was ever a person in fashion who could design a campaign that would incite a convincing conspiracy theory it is Volkova.

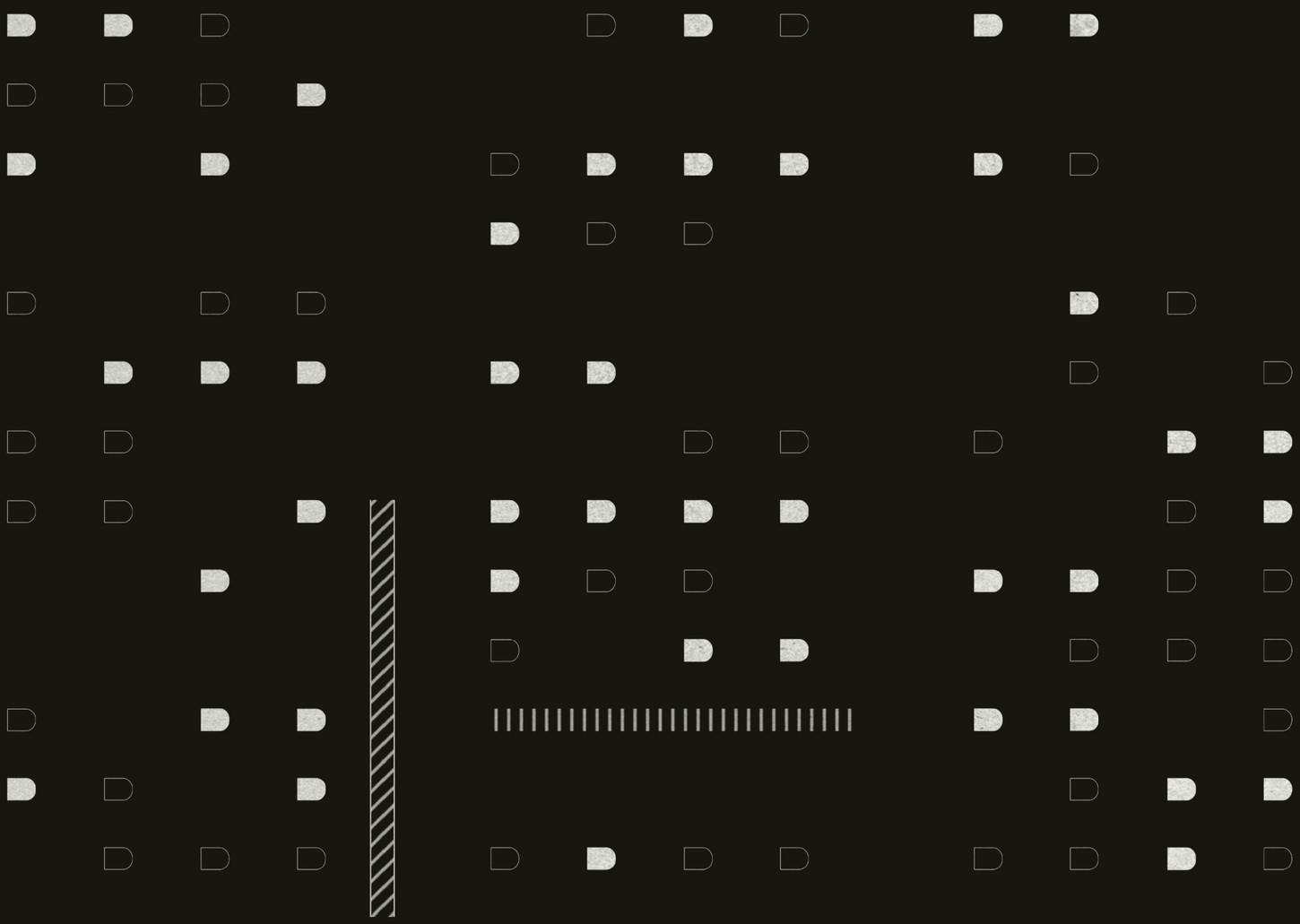
Then there is Galimberti, whose photo series The Ameriguns(2020) was an intended critique of American gun culture. However, the problem with this is that the images look more like advertisements than condemnations to a North American audience. Perhaps to an Italian, a muscle-clad man with a flamethrower is shocking and grotesque, but to an American who grew up in the pop culture milieu of Rambo and Top Gun it simply looks cool. Galimberti’s aesthetic ambiguity and inability to properly translate his work across borders could conceivably be taken advantage of by a competent art director or stylist, such as Volkova. It would give Balenciaga plausible deniability as Europeans - which predictably was one of the things Demna cited in his statement – while igniting a flame in the mind of the internet’s consciousness. Although it does make one wonder about a brand that’s willing to reduce child sex crimes into an aesthetic concept.

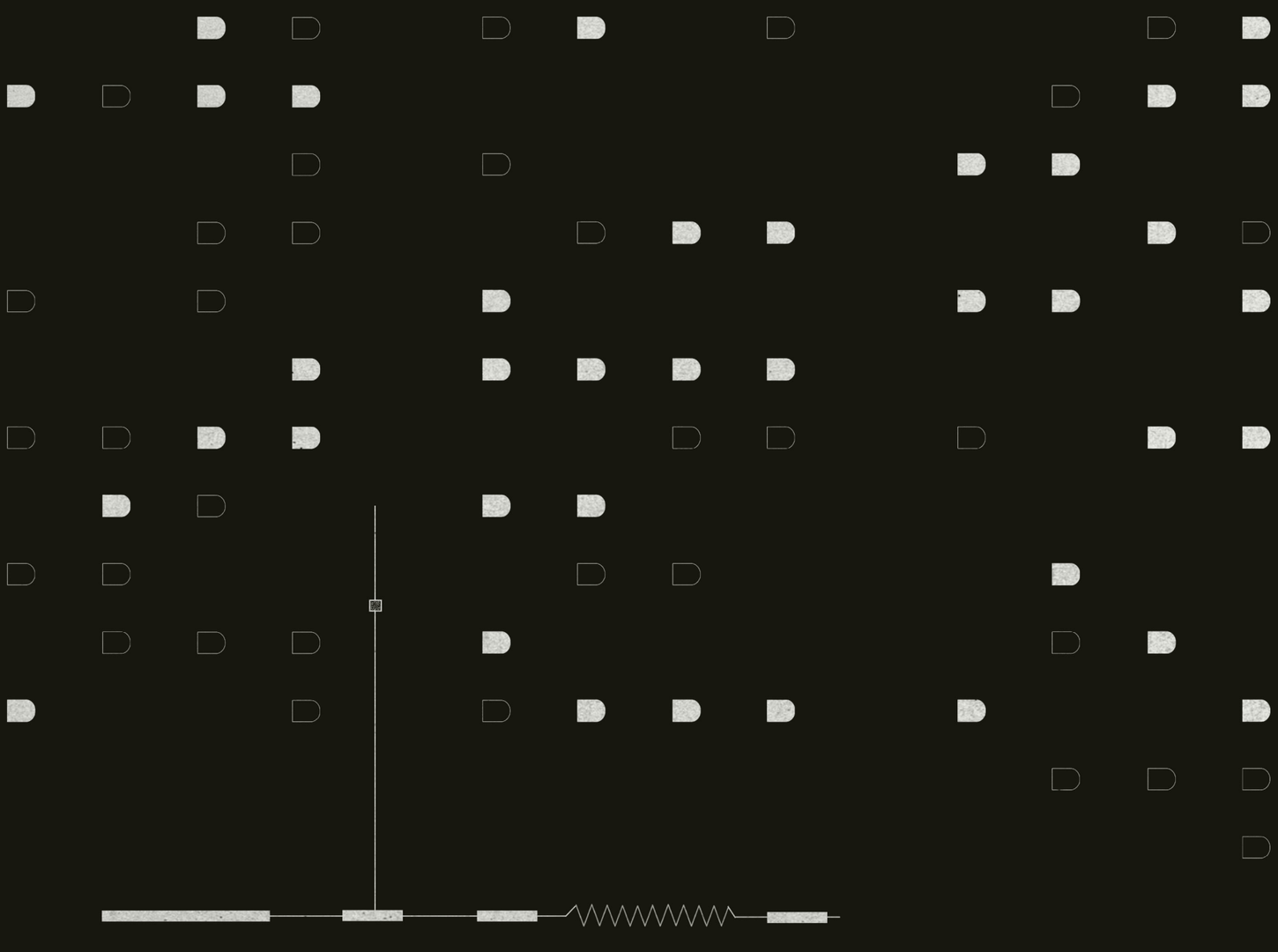
As of January 2023, we still have no closure on this campaign, the images were removed from Balenciaga’s site and only the Business of Fashion ever talked about the controversy at length. Was it an admission, a warning or just a marketing tactic made in poor taste? We will likely never know what Balenciaga meant by their campaign, but we can understand what it exposed and what it can tell us in the broader cultural context.

MILLIONS NOW LIVING WILL NEVER DIE



MILLIONS LIVING MUST NOW DIE

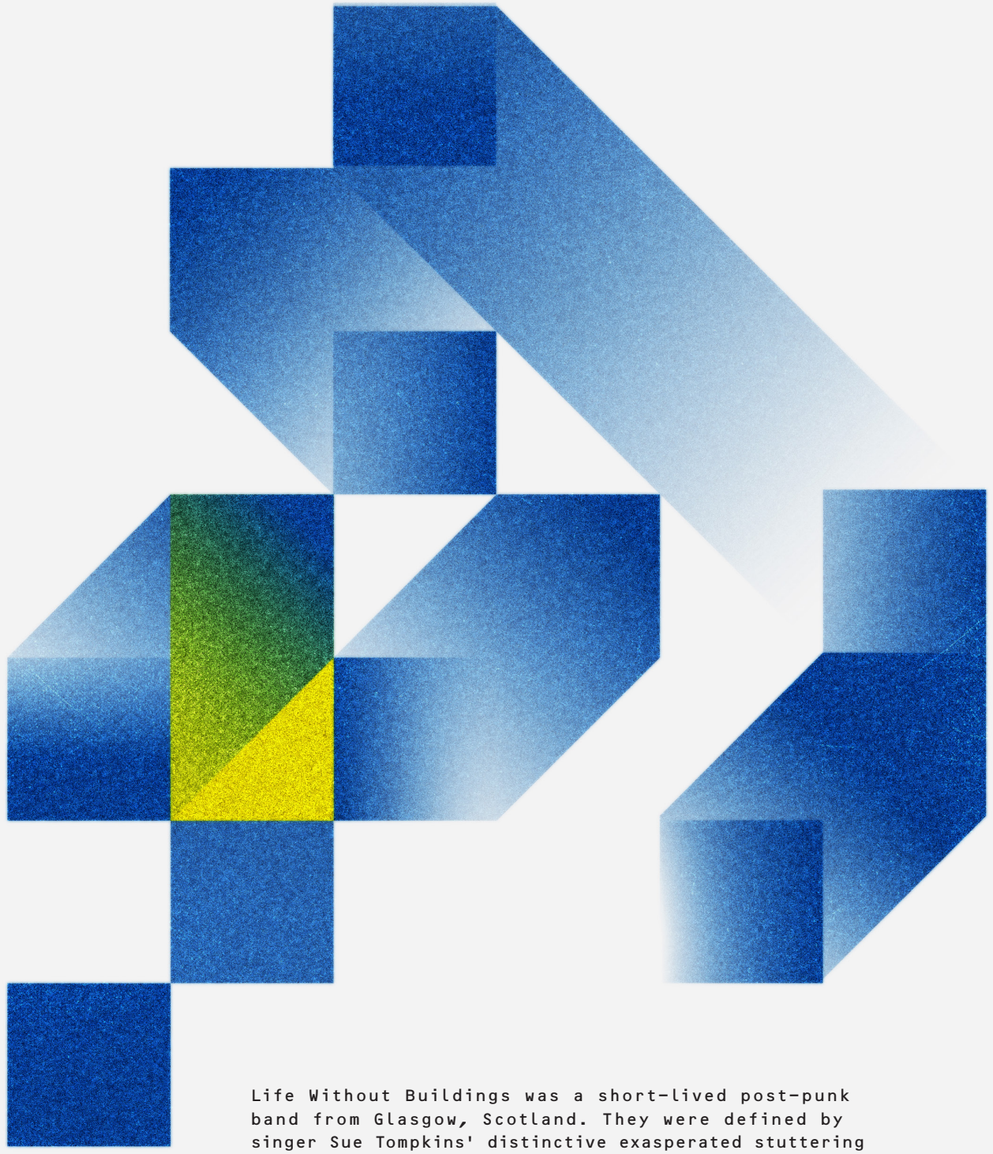




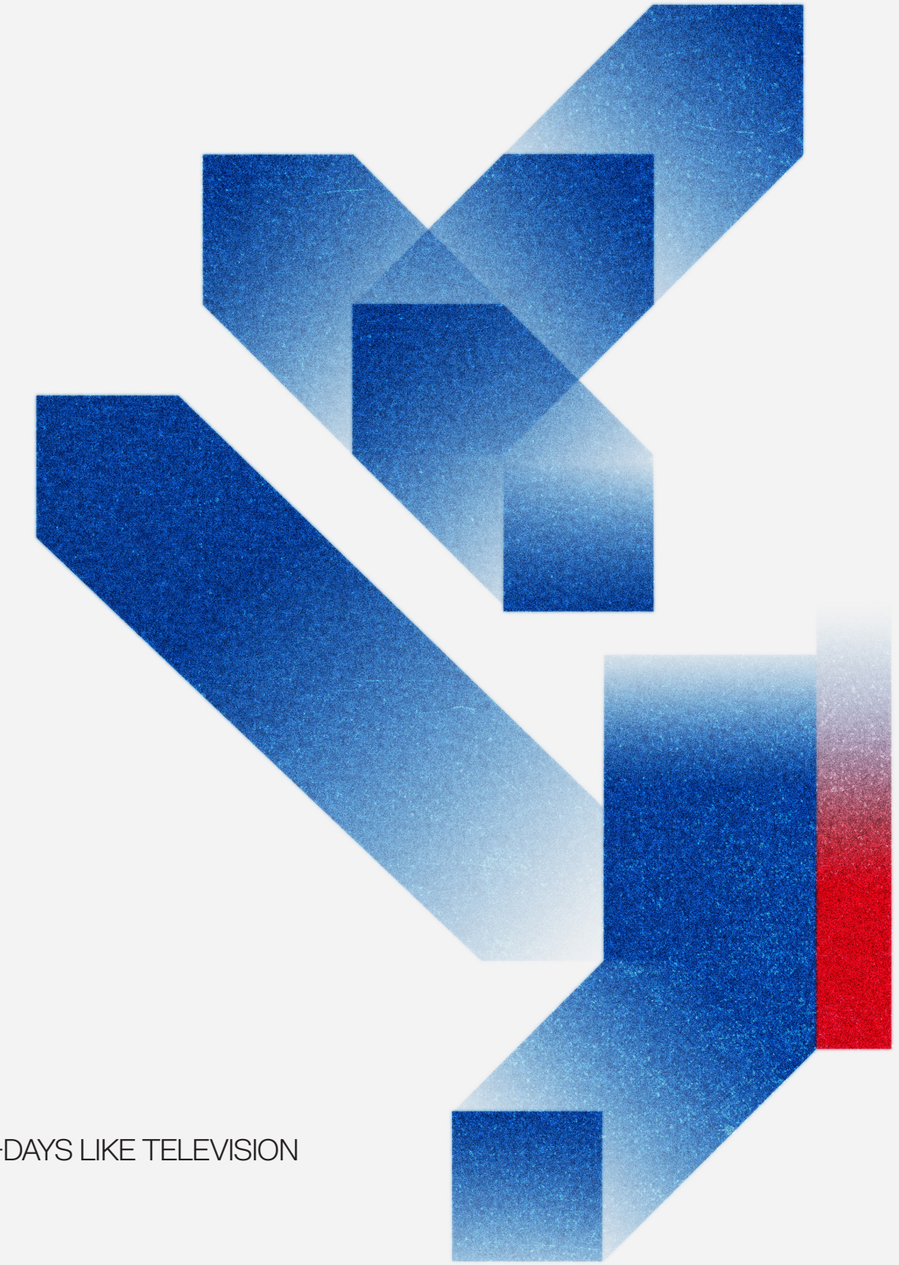
02.SPACE

A mechanism of movement towards the infinity (Mohammed Azizul Mohith, 2015) terminating on a structure fading into the horizon. The meeting of which with the vertical, determines the site, that fixes the relation of things in the view. How is this reconciled with the proliferation of non-space? Prophetically described as "something like counter sites" places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality." (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986), Cousin to the liminal, non-space as per Auge, other space as per Foucault results in our supermodern excess of space (Auge, 2006), but not the vast open plains of Elysium with it's soft glowing light, and lush flowing grasses appearing like God's breath. Instead, our space is geographically without referent, homogenous and impossible to differentiate. In a past time this kind of space was found only in the transitional and the commute, the highways and the interstate, the bus stops, the city street (although oftentimes the street had a character of its own). Now today this space where concerns of relations, history and identity are erased encompasses all including the home, the bedroom, and our machines. The collective amnesia of the internet leaking like escaped light into our physical spaces.

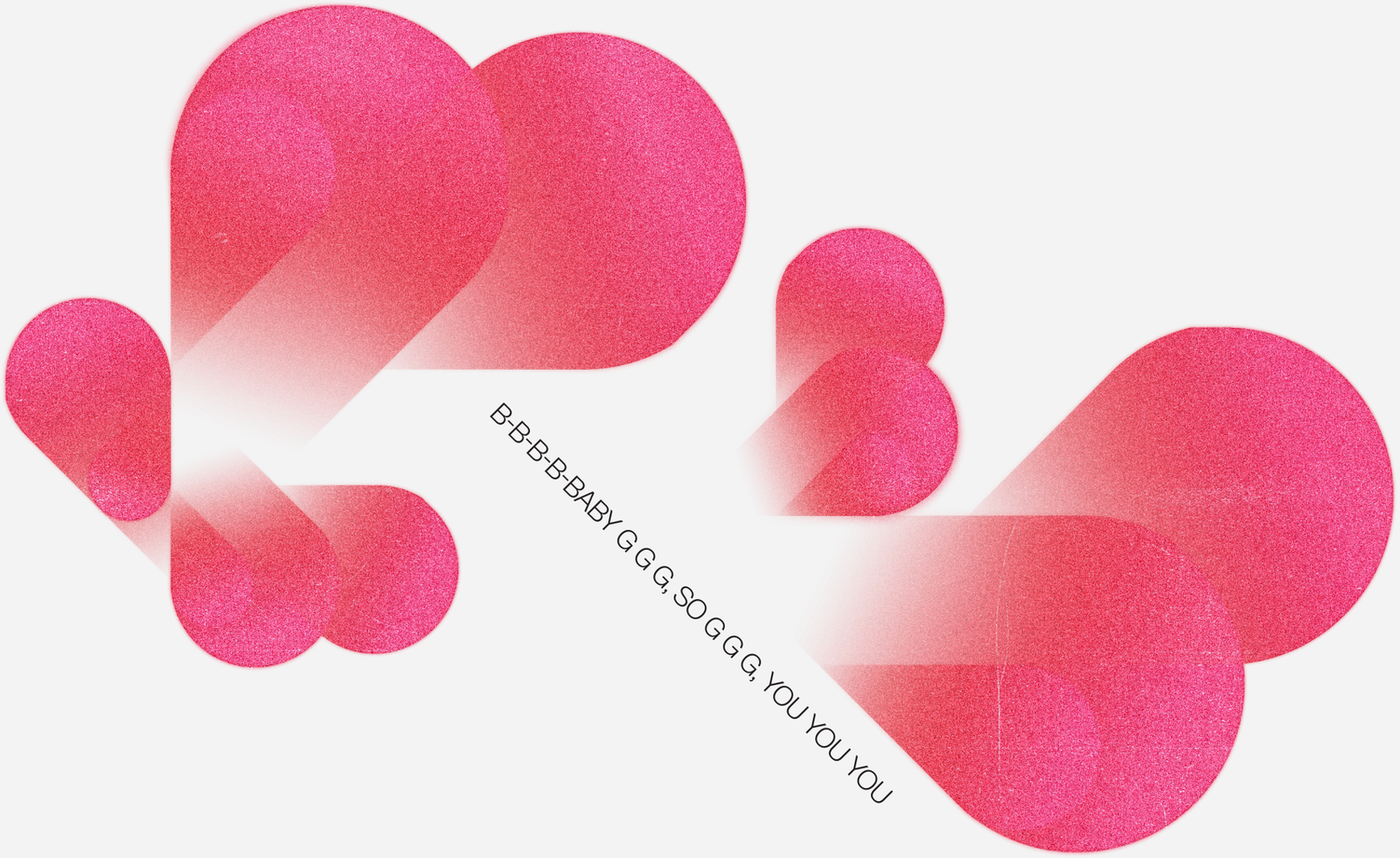
Examined here is real space, thought of as one time user friendly solutions. A glass facade so often the ire of the general public who revile its anonymity yet is a pure expression of human-centered design. An abundance of natural light and concerned only with enhancing the quality of life the inhabitant. Auge differentiated space from place as place acquired meaning from its anthropological usage. Space, rather, non-space simply no one seems to care about. (2006) Perhaps by looking backwards we can anticipate all contingencies and uncover a hidden clue.

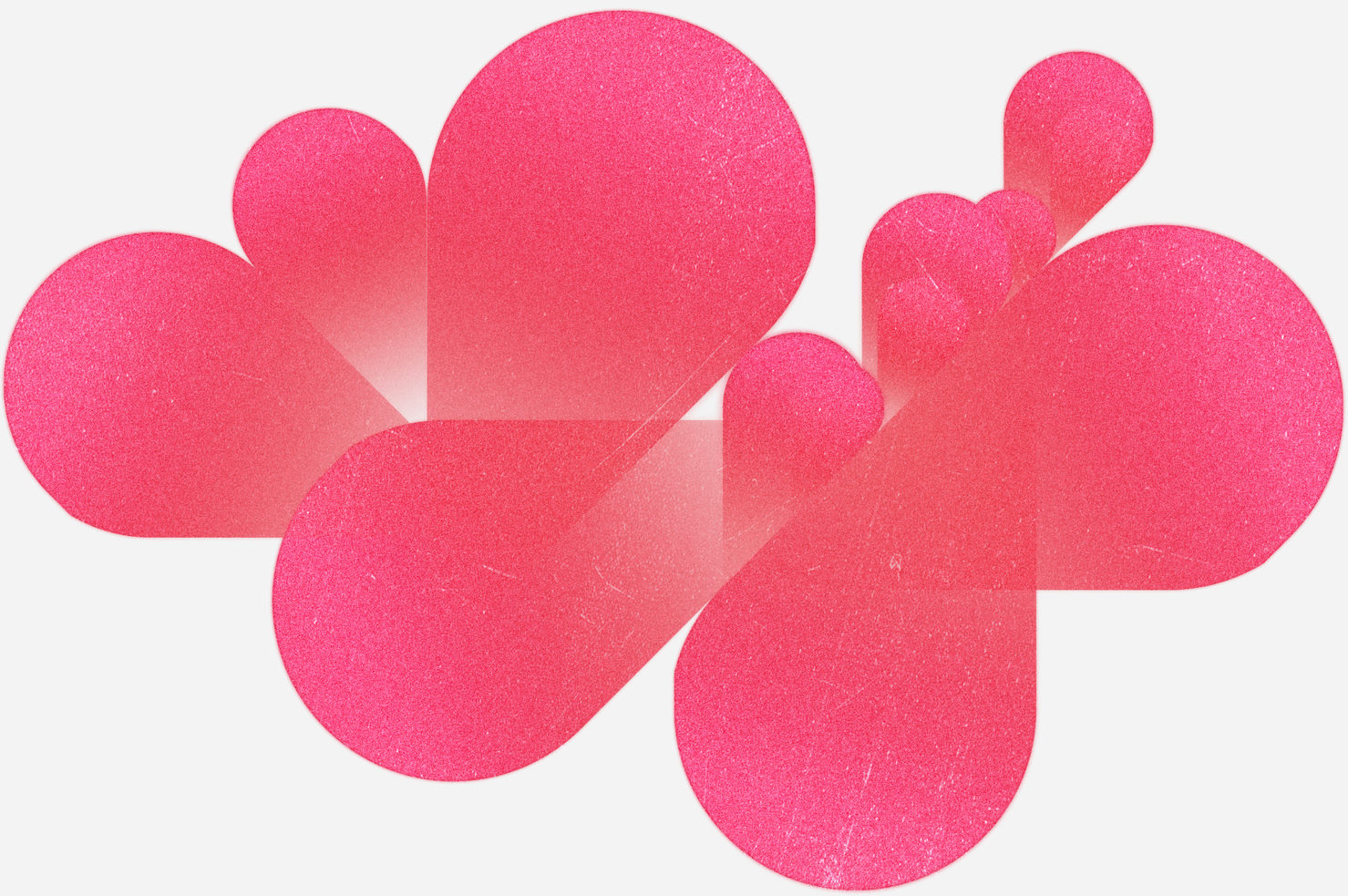


Life Without Buildings was a short-lived post-punk band from Glasgow, Scotland. They were defined by singer Sue Tompkins' distinctive exasperated stuttering delivery and absurdist lyrics which were broken down into their constituent phonetics. The symbolism of the word translated through sound like tessellations of a fading shape, a squawk or shout scantly resembling anything at all, yet when repeated and contextualized, something inimitable emerged.

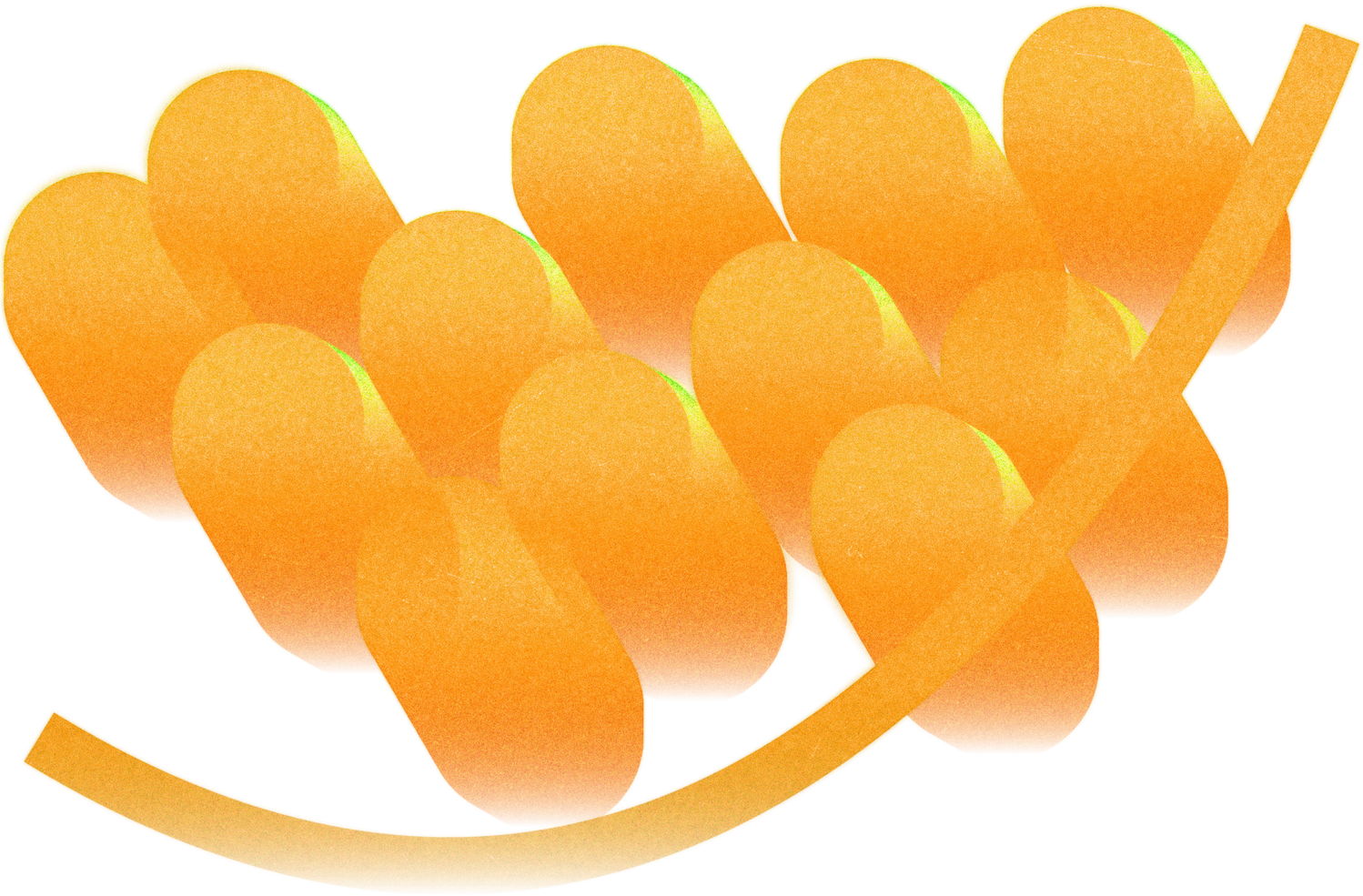


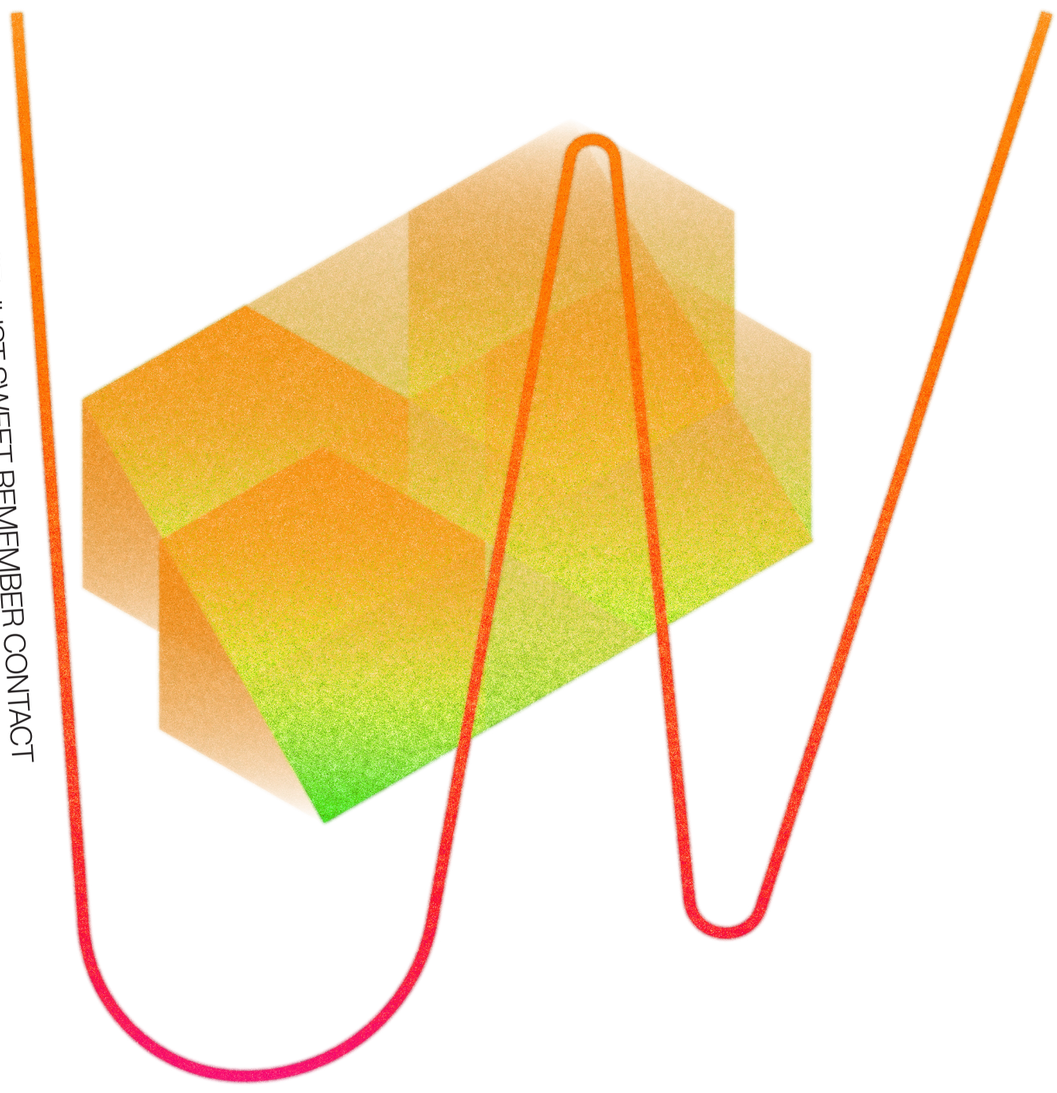
D-D-D-D-D-DAYS LIKE TELEVISION


B-B-B-B-BABY G G G, SO G G G, YOU YOU YOU



UH HUH, UH HUH, UH HUH, MMM





G G COME HERE COME HERE COME

CONTACT, CONTACT, JUST SWEET REMEMBER CONTACT

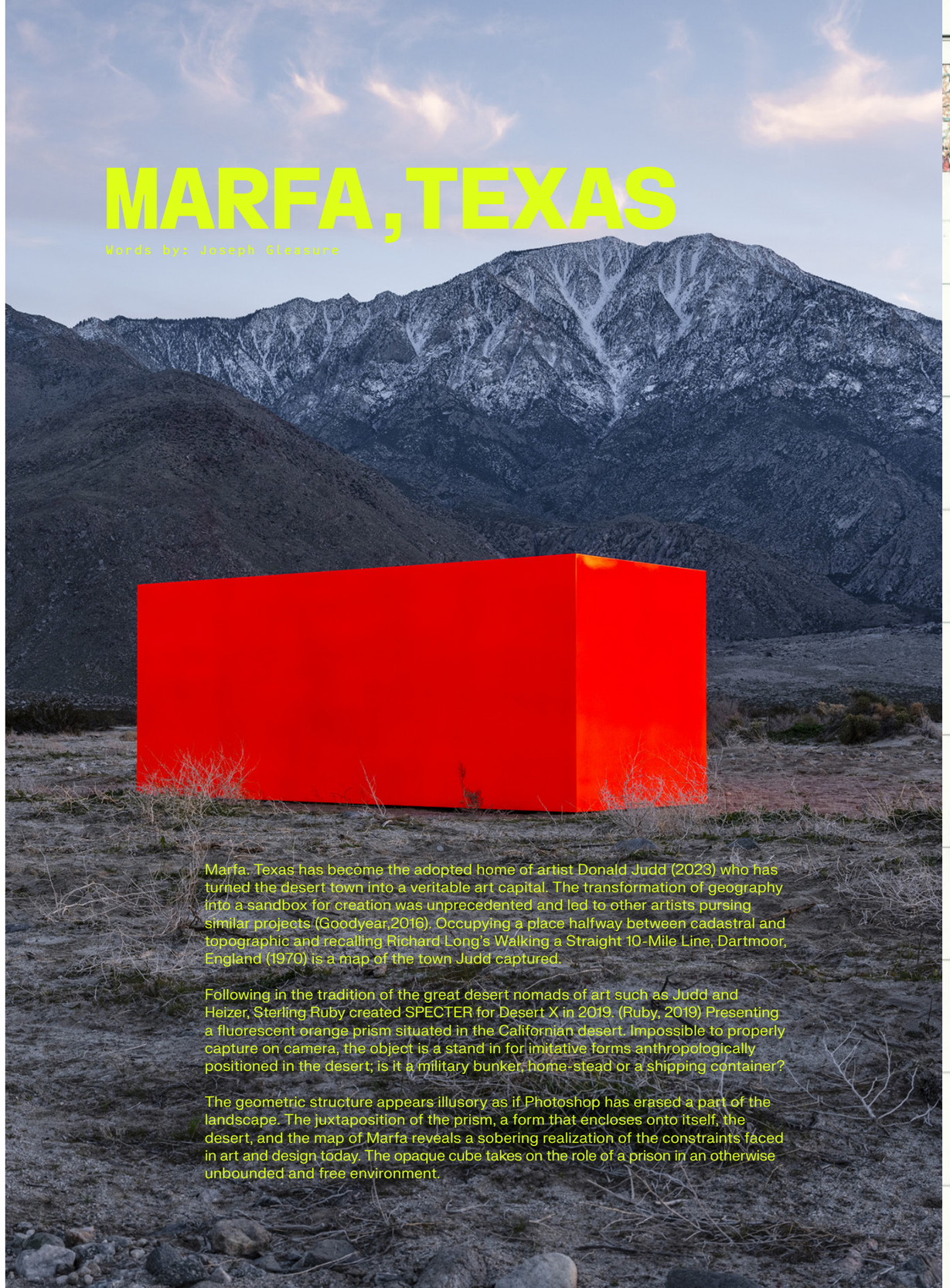
IF I, IF I, IF I, IF I, IF I

IF I LOSE YOU

OH I, M B V M B V M B V M B V M B V MORE M B V HI FI

MARFA, TEXAS

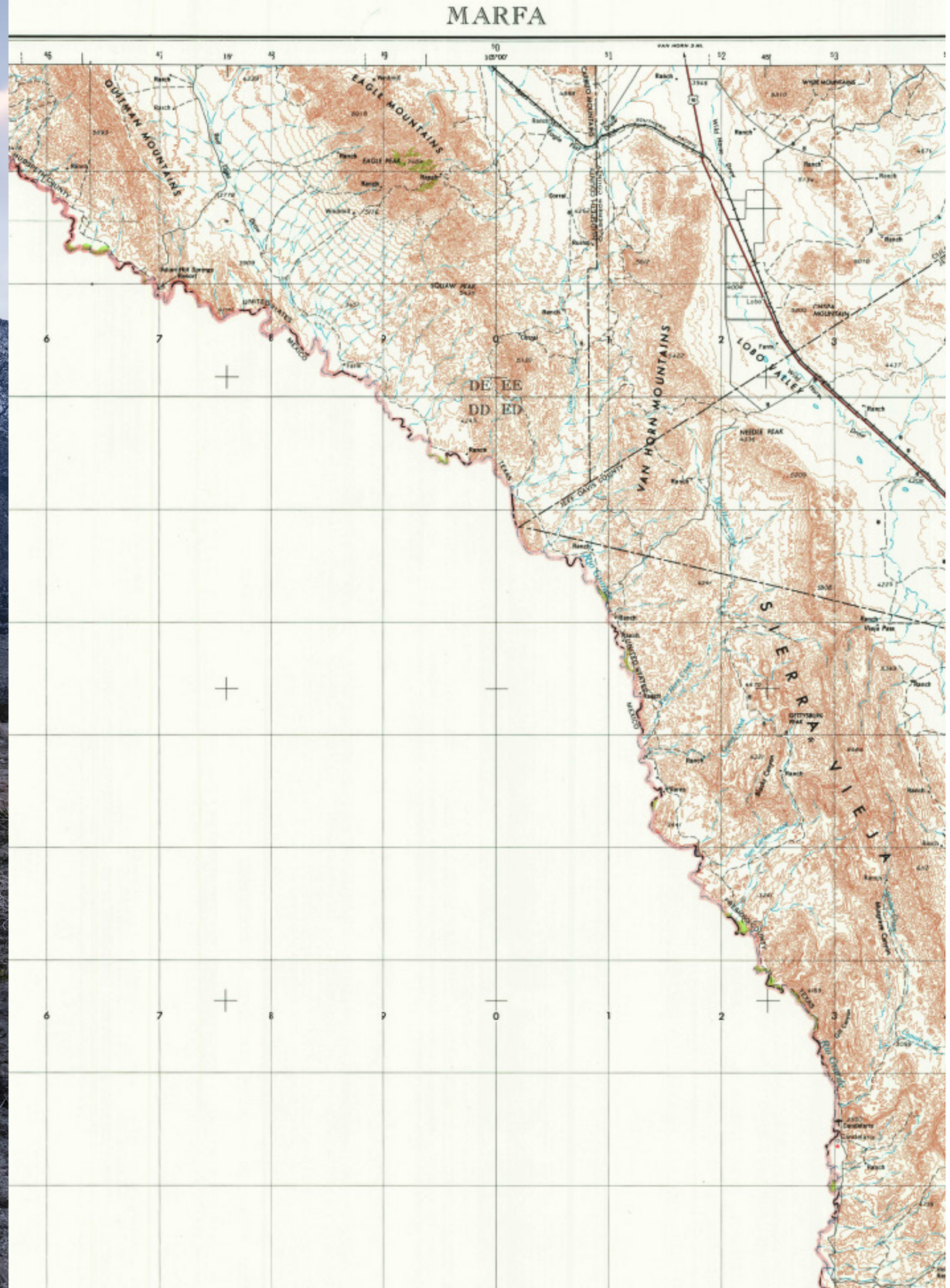
Words by: Joseph Gleasure



Marfa. Texas has become the adopted home of artist Donald Judd (2023) who has turned the desert town into a veritable art capital. The transformation of geography into a sandbox for creation was unprecedented and led to other artists pursing similar projects (Goodyear,2016). Occupying a place halfway between cadastral and topographic and recalling Richard Long's Walking a Straight 10-Mile Line, Dartmoor, England (1970) is a map of the town Judd captured.

Following in the tradition of the great desert nomads of art such as Judd and Heizer, Sterling Ruby created SPECTER for Desert X in 2019. (Ruby, 2019) Presenting a fluorescent orange prism situated in the Californian desert. Impossible to properly capture on camera, the object is a stand in for imitative forms anthropologically positioned in the desert; is it a military bunker, home-stead or a shipping container?

The geometric structure appears illusory as if Photoshop has erased a part of the landscape. The juxtaposition of the prism, a form that encloses onto itself, the desert, and the map of Marfa reveals a sobering realization of the constraints faced in art and design today. The opaque cube takes on the role of a prison in an otherwise unbounded and free environment.



TOWERS IN THE PARK

forgotten housing of the future

Photography by
Joseph Gleasure

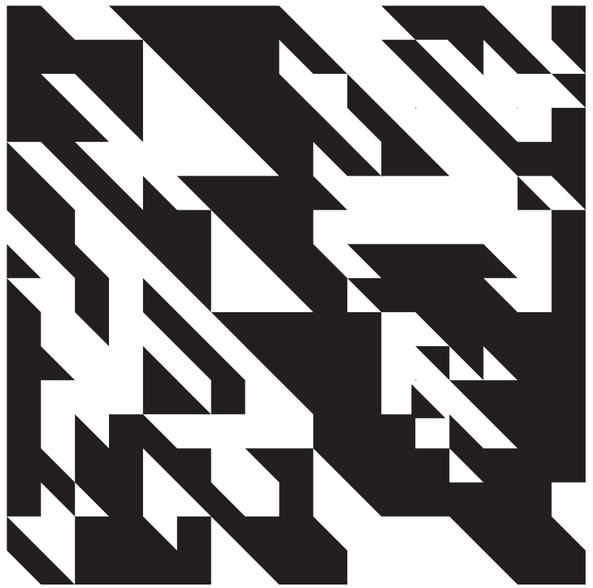
Words adapted from
Le Courbousier's Ville Contemporaine,
Wikipedia & Superarchitecture: Le
Futur de L'architecture 1950-1975

The promise of a middle class life and informed by the foremost thought leaders in architecture. A mere 60 years on, decrepit and hollow, yet more beautiful than the newest complex in the city. And why urbanism? Because. It is the single most present aspect determining the cartesian limits of our thoughts. Simultaneously a relic and demarcation line, Saint James Town reminds the viewer of the once great heights Canadian modernism reached while marking the very sharp limits to urban life upon the individual.

VOTF
Nr. 1 - Design thinking

Architecture

565 SHERBOURNE



The car would abolish the human street, and possibly the human foot. Some people would have aeroplanes too. The one thing no one would have is a place to bump into each other, walk the dog, strut, one of the hundred random things that people do ... being random was loathed by Le Corbusier ... its inhabitants surrender their freedom of movement to the omnipresent architect.

a street that is a square, and
that still succeeds in enveloping its
encloses, the community and all
its hierarchy of associations

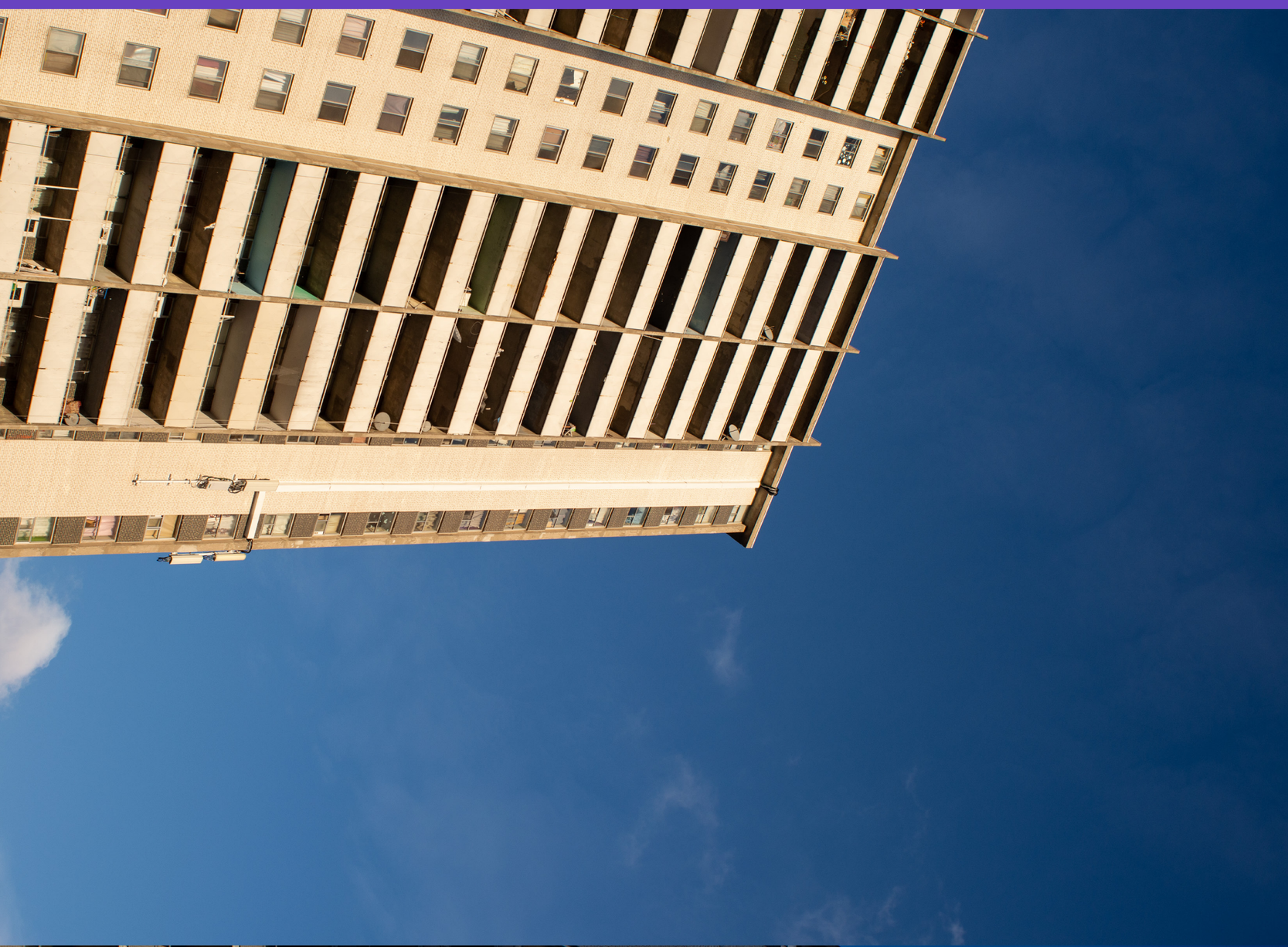
here it is not only a question
of vocabulary but also a
problem, precisely, of form.

375 BLEECKER

the architectural spray and pill bomb,
or the cable-woven suit
carrying architecture
to the limit of
its own extinction

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Architecture

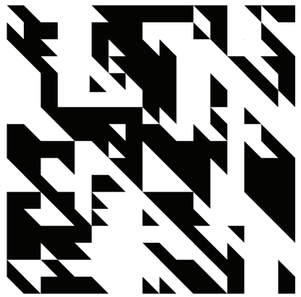


captured through the camera, the reality of urban life

325 BLEECKER

leaving a conquering vision of spatial planning in search of preserving the narrative of the landscape

nature, the territory in all its geographies, reveals itself as the public space par excellence



‘Towers in the park’ is a morphology of modernist high rise apartment buildings characterized by a high-rise building (a “slab”) surrounded by a swath of landscaped land. Thus, the tower does not directly front the street.

A Suburban Composite

Eflat Major
Bflat Major
F Major
C Major
G Major

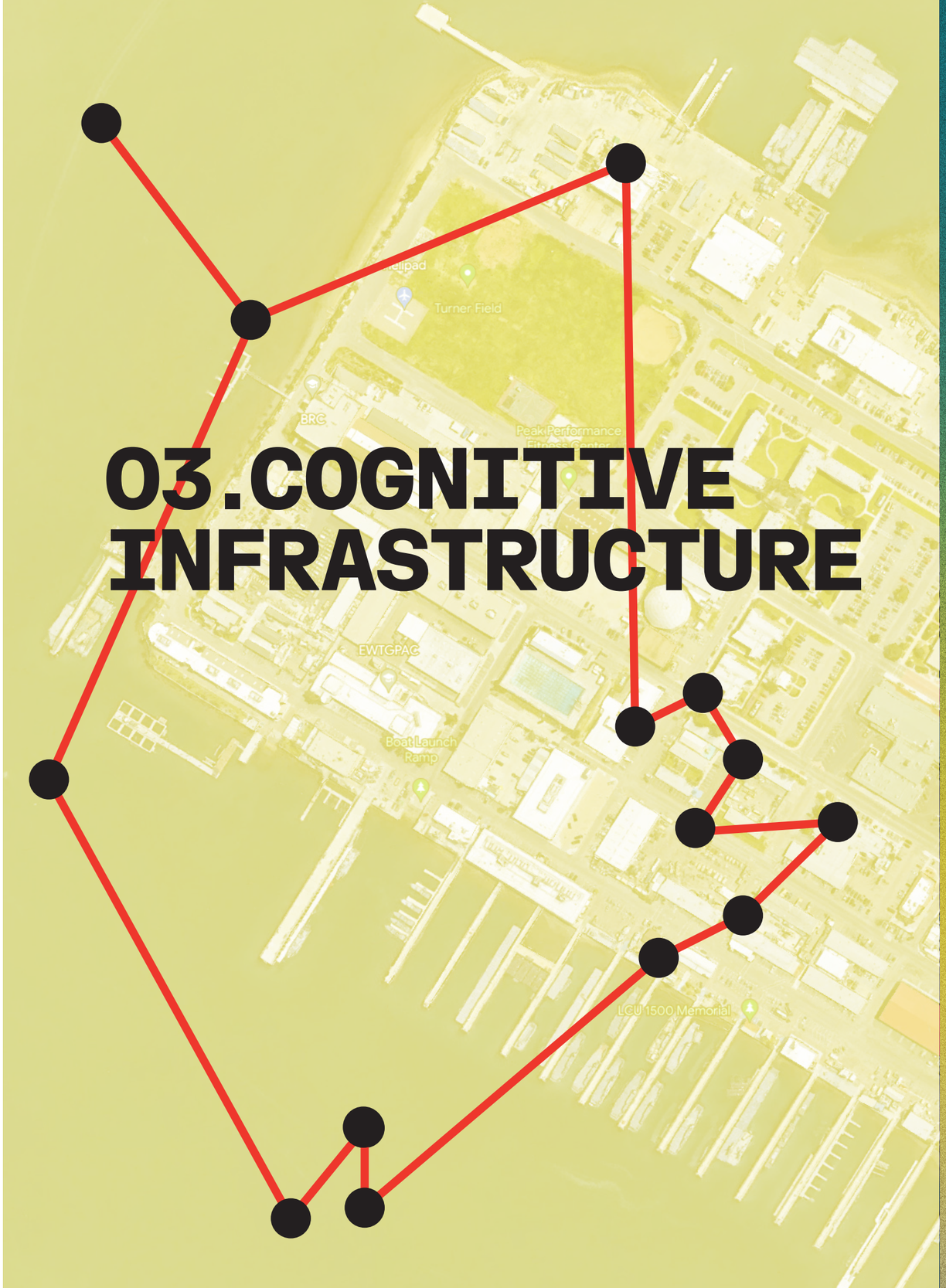
100bpm

The quiet little corner of the earth where I learned the word ‘bucolic’. For all it’s domineering capabilities every now and then no matter how fleeting a moment an ephemeral sketch reveals itself.

Maybe it isn’t so bad here after all.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Photography



03.COGNITIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Station to Station, medium to medium , oscillating between the abstract and the real. The cool heat death of the universe, the rat in the cage. A Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act for the citizens of the world. Nomadic and drifting slowly. Cognitive infrastructure is the formal and informal frameworks that govern the thoughts we are able to conceive. It is a moral imperative to keep alive the collective consciousness that is being strangled as if it were a weed. However, it would be wise to remember that those suffocating the flora have names and addresses. That they are human and reachable.

Such great importance is placed upon that which occurs in the shadows. Rhizomatic, Paradigmatic, Schizophrenic, and so on. Instantaneously downloading the latest Anglo-American patch update into the minds of billions via informational sinews and networks, castigating anyone who opposes it. In this view Kafka comes to mind (Kafka (1925/1992), all enemies are guilty and their denial proves that the offender doesn't understand the intersectional nature of the multiplicity of their offenses. (Enrenreich and Lacey, 2019)

A fist through the glass box of emotional presentism, cognitive dissonance, external cognition. To recall a great thinker *"If only we could simply look up and stop seeing landscapes as blurry irrelevances lying either side of the dual carriageway, we could find a way of reorienting ourselves in physical and symbolic space, of finding our way back"*. (Belevan, 2021)

VOTF
Nr. 1 - Design thinking

Chapter

figure 1. refinement of the decline

Four ways of expressing the same idea. If there ever has been a false god it is pedagogy, what use is a field that reinvents itself every ten years? Yet within its own chaos it continues to educate the masses.

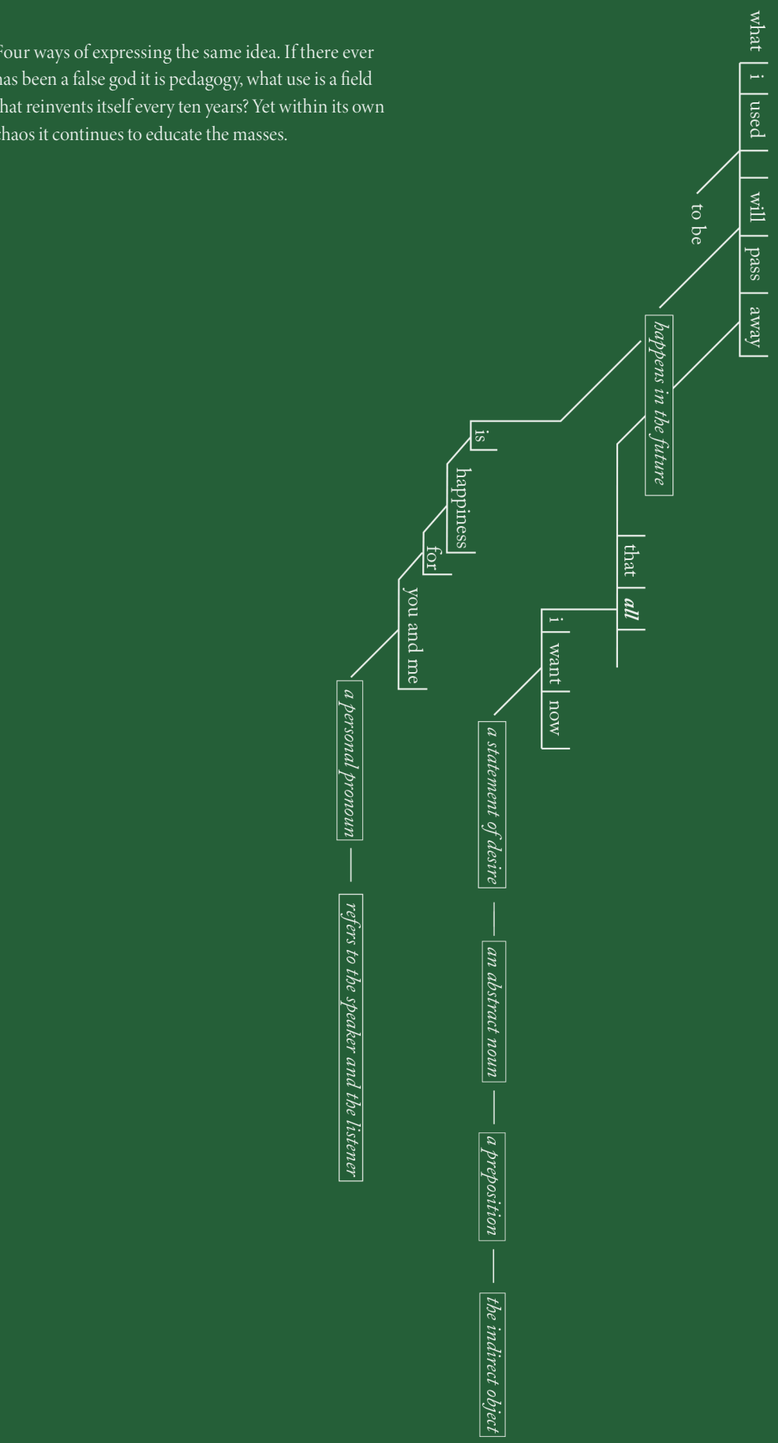


figure 2. a red barchetta

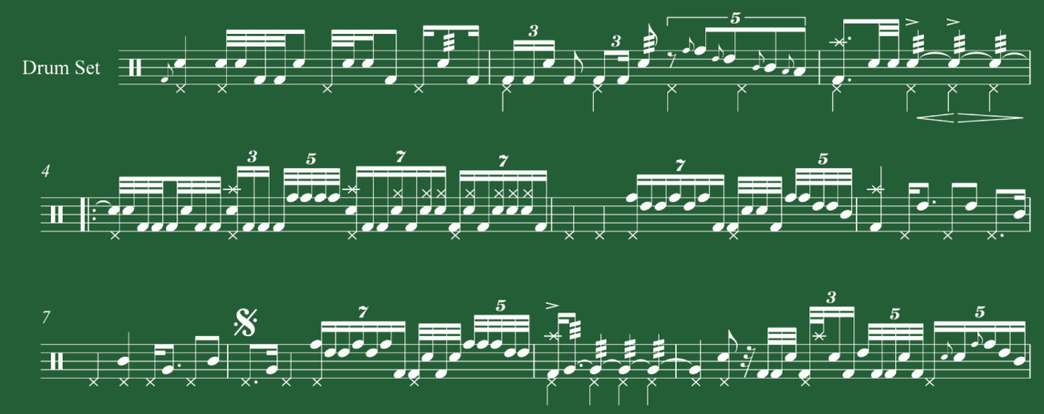


figure 3. a steady rain storm

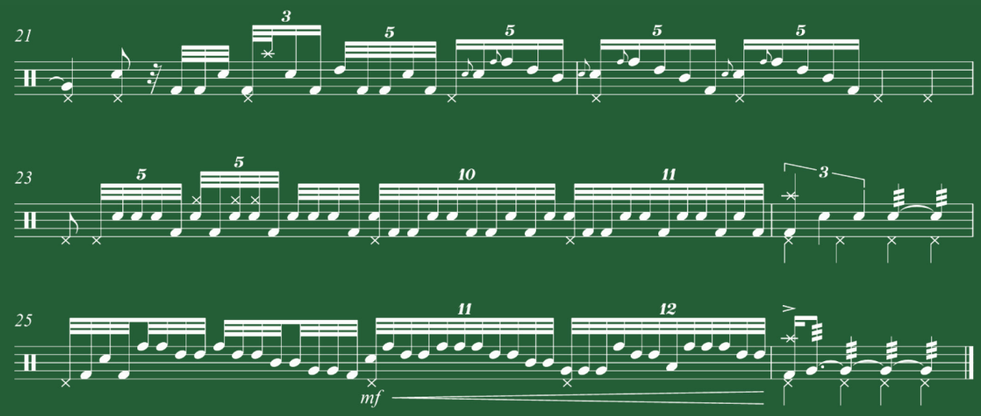


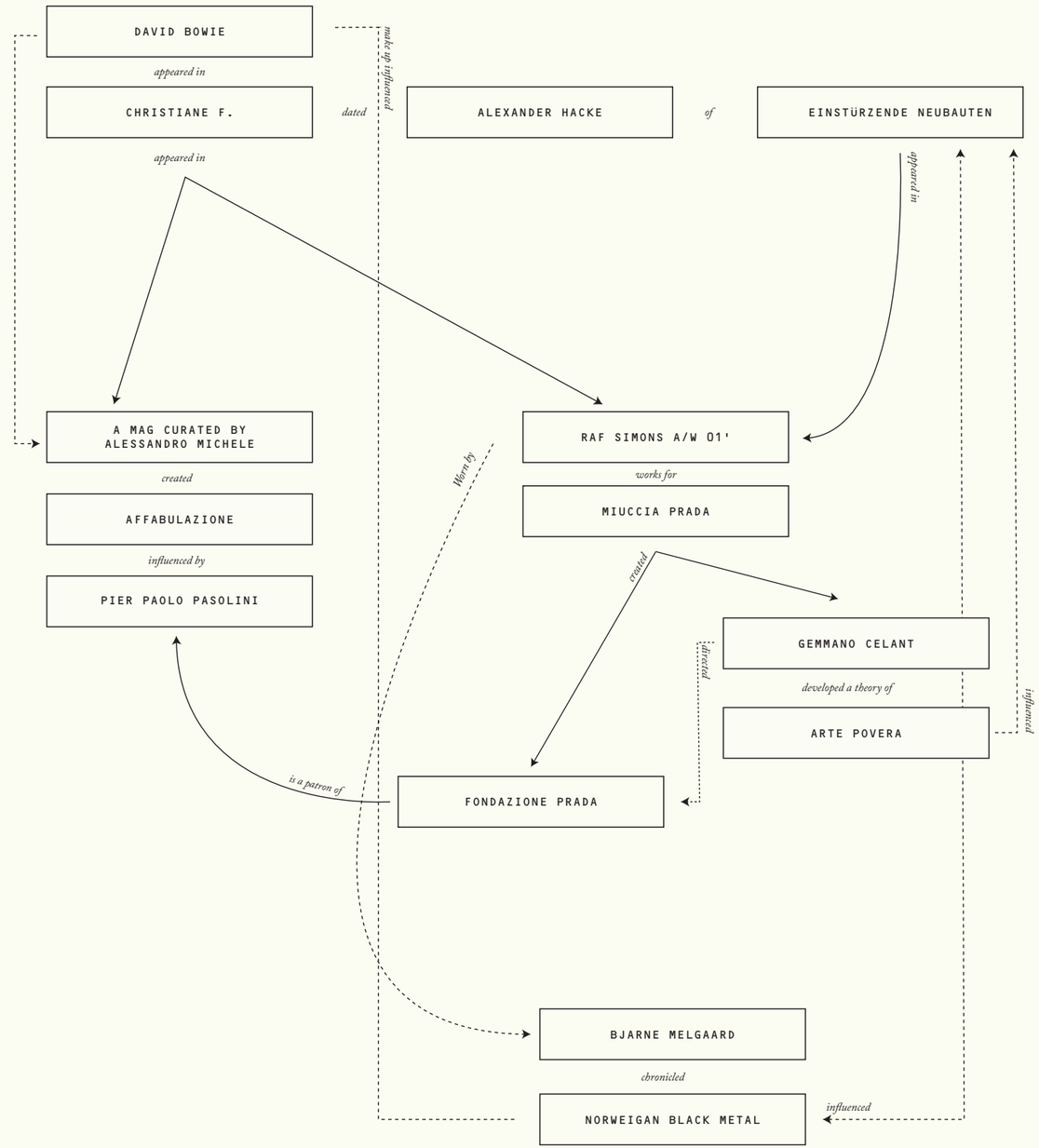
figure 4. laying an egg.

```
x = 5

if x > 0:
    print("x is positive")
else:
    print("x is not positive")
```

figure 5. mother goose comes home to roost.

```
let x = 5;

if (x > 0) {
  console.log("x is positive");
} else {
  console.log("x is not positive");
}
```


figure 6. in march of 2000 Mark Lombardi was found hanged in his New York apartment.

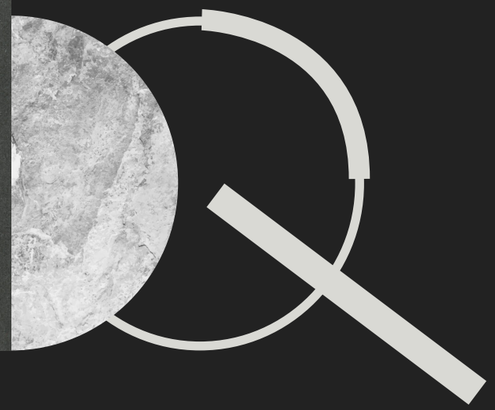


WAITING FOR GODOT

If leaving had any effect you would have already left.

Art Direction by Joseph Gleasure
Photography by Joshua Will
Modelling by Justin & Masao

Fundamentally Beckett's magnum opus is about nursing unacted desire. The titular Godot, a stand in for God never appears and it is never made clear if he is real. A pointed remark in the 20th century that is only more relevant today. Are Vladimir and Estragon alive or dead? A question whose answer is irrelevant. What is relevant is that by their own machinations that they are unable to quench that which they thirst for most. A metaphor for the post-modern condition if there ever was one.



[Left] Coat & Pants: Comme Des Garcons Homme Plus; Sweater: Yohji Yamamoto Pour Homme; Boots: Attachment

[Right] Coat C.P. Company; Sweater: Yohji Yamamoto Pour Homme; Pants: Comme Des Garcons Homme; Boots: Model's Own

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking
Photography

I LOVE THE FUTURE
AND THE FUTURE LOVES ME

GOD BLESS THE FUTURE
AND GOD BLESS ME

you can ride a plane
a train a boat a car a
truck, skateboard,
rollerblade, ice skate, run
walk, jog, to wherever it
is you think you're going

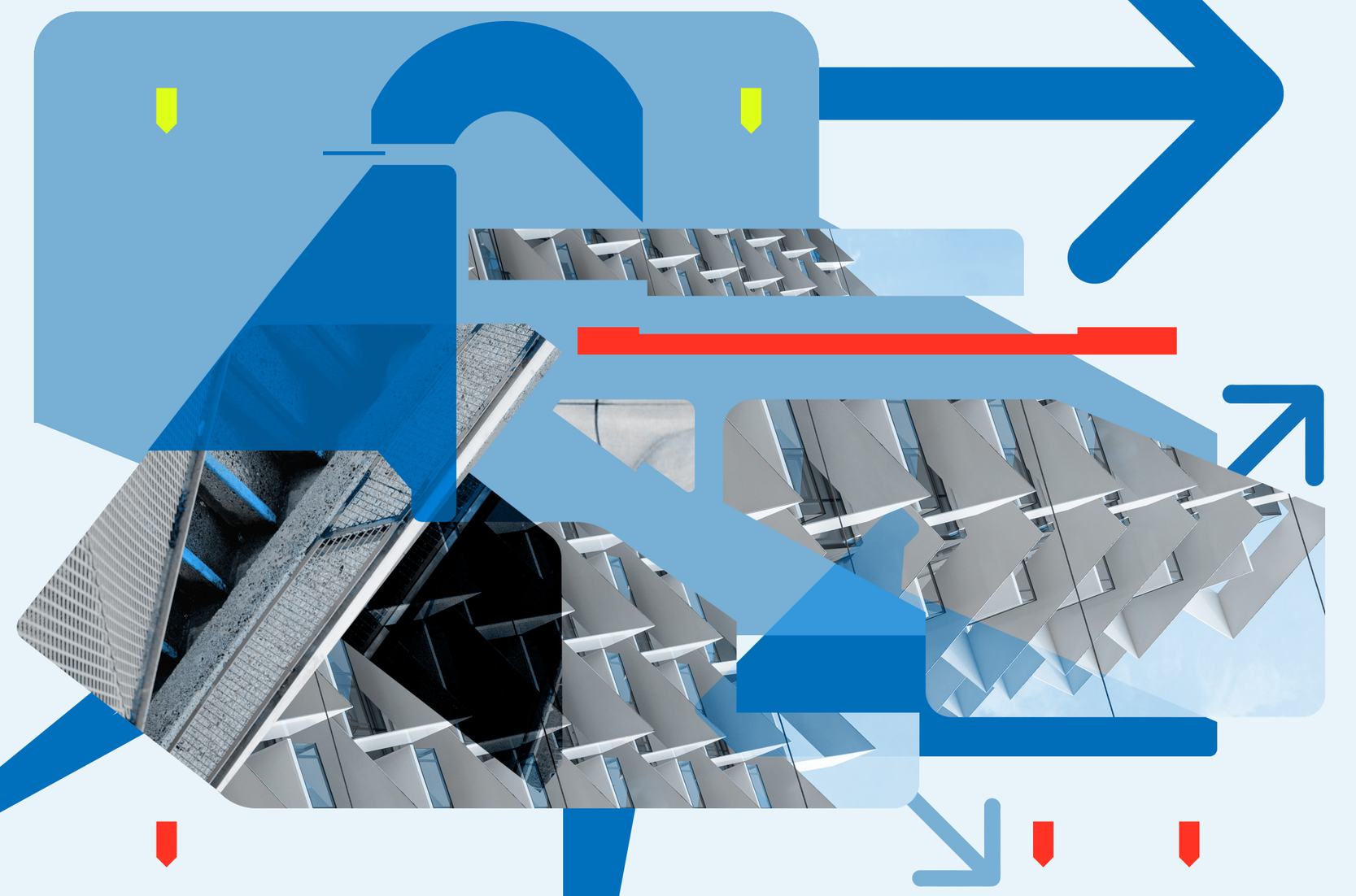
location location location
its all about where you are
where you are going and
where you want to be

Everything looks the
same and sounds the
same and smells the
same and feels the
same and is the same.

VISION OF THE FUTURE

A solution to
the despair that
encroaches on
our dreams

Words by
Joseph Gleasure



The classical anthropological usage of an artefact is an object that can tell observers something about the time it was created in. Who knows what the world might look like in 2 years, 20 years, or 200 years, but long after our time is up, what will the things we leave behind tell those who remain?

Consider the automobile emblematic of the post-war lifestyle and economic boom - breaking down into rust and decay in mere decades after being constructed. It's temporality is a symbol for the post-war prosperity itself. The car represents the unbridled freedom of post war America, widespread personal transportation captured the popular imagination of 1950s America though seminal literature like 'On the Road'. The steady rhythm of the combustion engine became the heartbeat of America from the coasts of New York and San Francisco brought together via the interstate system. Then in the late 1970s and early 80s, through the development of house and techno music in places like Detroit and Chicago. The mechanical hum of the car factories found its way to the dancehalls and nightclubs, synthesized through drum machines and CDJs (Nikiru et al., 2019).

The material gains the West and especially North America enjoyed in the intervening period after the Second World War and before 9/11 are slowly being eroded, and the car itself has now become a cultural battleground between generations (Reeves, 2022). For those of the past they cling desperately to an America that no longer exists and can no longer exist, for those of the present they oppose an America they cannot comprehend or conceive of. They are the blind asking what a colour is. Neither group has a cogent understanding of what the future is, nor do they seem to have any interest in it.

Is it any wonder our expected futures are dimmer every single day? This is evident through the design of the everyday. Nearly every new item we interact with results from this managed cultural decline and stagnation. Our culture has become cynical, and so too have our artefacts. Popular pundits now argue over whether or not the average person should be allowed to own a truck, a gas stove or use plastics (Weise, 2023). Common items no longer fit for the common man. These lines of thought may appear to come from a genuine concern for the environment, but these arguments tend to arise from negation. Those proposing them do not ask what alternatives people want but rather dictate a predetermined set of austerity replete with prefabricated rhetorical defenses as cheaply constructed as their products. Then of course, there is carefully constructed consumption of old products. Designed to be hidden just out of view of the public but be widely available to the upper classes who are never shamed out of their education of consumption (Symes, 2023). After all, no one expects the rich to embrace synthetic meat or bug-based protein.

"Just 25 years ago, our culture was full of optimism."

Where did it go wrong? Just 25 years ago, our culture was full of optimism. As the internet and computers entered everyday life, companies thought of ways to enrich the lives of millions with clever albeit quirky objects (Collins & Tam, 2023). Translucent materials that blurred the demarcation lines between the user and the environment were used in increasing frequency. As the popular imagination was filled with future dreams of digitalism. If the social media trends of the last few years are to be believed, the late 1990s might have been the last time in the west believed in itself, and its ability to create positive outcomes for it's citizens. While Britpop in the UK sardonically poked fun at contemporary British life through seminal albums like Blur's 'Modern life is Rubbish' and later the brilliant satire of grunge 'Song 2' the UK enjoyed a cultural relevancy and resurgence they hadn't seen since the 1960s. Euro 1996, Knebworth 1996, Spiritualized, Farrow Design, Warp Records, Tomato, Underworld, Drum and Bass, Goldie, The London College of Printing, The Designer's Republic, Galliano, and McQueen. Then across the pond in America: Emigre, Carson, Raygun, the death of grunge, and Apple's revival via the iMac G3. The collective consciousness not just in the English speaking world but even places like Japan who were experiencing what is now referred to as 'the lost generation' were still capable of creating incredible design.

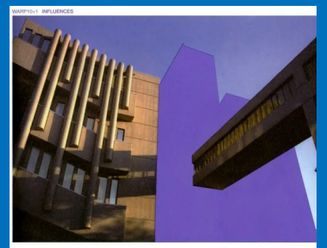
Yet slowly, throughout the 2000s, creativity seemed to stall and then recede. Personal electronics and digital creation tools had never been easier to access via early peer-to-peer torrenting networks and .ISO piracy. Yet, somehow unfettered access to professional grade tools didn't seem to make design better. In fact by making design accessible via 'democratization', we seemed to tank its value as well as crippling the way we were able to think about it. Graphic design was turned into a joke as in the late aughts as businesses falsely thought anyone with a computer and pirated copy of Photoshop could take the place of a dedicated designer. The technology itself and the form factors further inhibited creativity by making it too easy to create bad work. Engineers became so brilliant at creating products that the public became worse at using them (Macgregor, 2021). Easy-to-use but lower-quality items such as smartphones and tablets started to replace purpose-built physical hardware. Personal electronics became 'idiot-proof' and didn't encourage curiosity or exploration[1], coupled with the increasing gulf between the art world and the public led to an increased distrust and devaluation of art and design itself in the general public.

1 Every single semester, millions of students have to be walked through basic concepts like how to save a file or the importance of backing up their work (Chin, 2021).

Farrow Design, 1996

Tomato, 1994

Metalheadz, 1995



The Designer's Republic, 1999

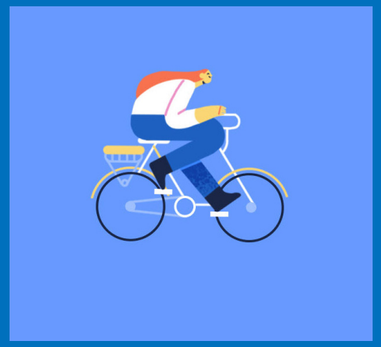
Then came the expansion of the biopolitical state and massive overreach (US Congress, 2001), an overreach that is constant and engulfing, touching everything imaginable. The war on terror led to invasive policies regarding technology and surveillance[2], most obviously through internet service providers avoiding lawsuits by intellectual property owners selling out end users for downloading a few songs on their networks.

While digital piracy played out in the public sphere, the intelligence agencies were busy lobbying the American and European governments to allow unprecedented levels of surveillance on domestic citizens. Some of the more egregious examples of executive overreach were met with incredible resistance such a PIPA, SOPA, and ACTA however, the most consequential policies were eventually passed mostly unnoticed. While there are far too many examples to list here, the war on terror resulted in multiple intelligence agencies being able to surveil and access the personal electronics of nearly anyone living in the west at any time without a warrant (GRITCULT, 2023). When Foucault spoke of the panopticon he was describing a kind of self-censorship that existed physically, we manage our behaviors in the real world based on the belief someone else could be watching us at any time (1975); this has only become more pronounced turning entire countries into open air confinement centres. The prison architecture that defines all space in the post-modern world has poisoned the cultural psyche which in turn bled into our design language. Is it a surprise that our design is cynical, homogenous and seeks to be as inoffensive as possible when we are treated like caged animals?

2 Italian Philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues convincingly that we now live in a 'constant state of exception' and that 'the new normal' brought on by changes in policy throughout the early 2000s now encourage our governments to 'create emergencies' wherein they're able to seize more power and establish even greater measures of control over the population (2005).

Notice, however, that despite the increased level of government controls, these 'emergencies' continue to occur with increasing frequency. Put another way, every failure is now an excuse to grant more power.

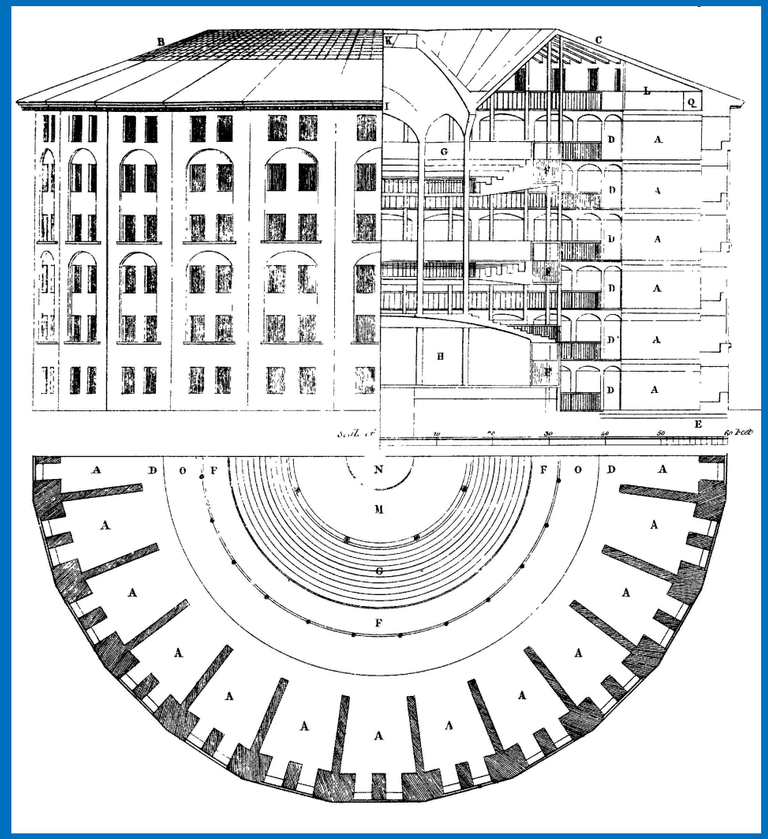
CIA Rebrand, 2021



Alegria graphic from Behance, 2023

The style Alegria was engineered by American design firm Buck to help rehabilitate Facebook's reputation. Since then it has become the de facto visual style in big tech, concealing the insidiousness of near constant surveillance with the deployment of cheerful minimalist vectors.

"Is it a surprise that our design is cynical, homogenous and seeks to be as inoffensive as possible when we are treated like caged animals?"



Plan of Jeremy Bentham's panopticon by Willey Revely, 1791

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

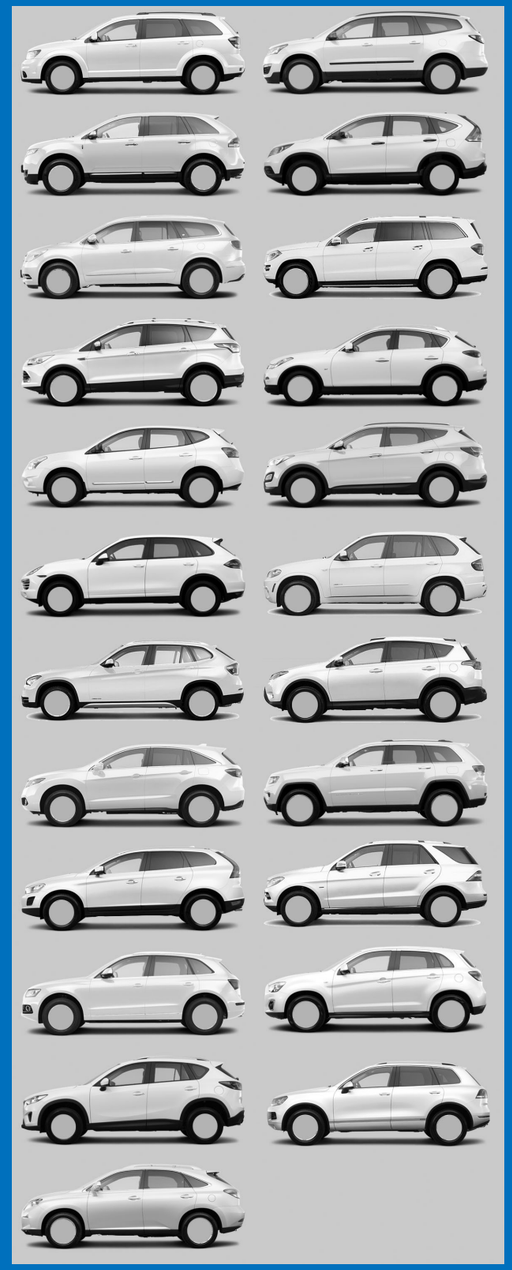
Op-ed

The silicon-laced metallic dreams of the 1990s have revealed themselves to be full of naivety and a misplaced optimism. The technology that promised to free us and envision new possibilities is now increasingly used to constrain every manner of though, action and word. This has had clear and devastating effects on our design, not solely in terms of aesthetics, but their functionality as well. Online we are bombarded with terrible low quality items that all look the same coming in molded plastics and hues of silver, grey, white, and black. [3]

Where are we now and what's left to do? Roll over and die? Accept our fate in a never ending cultural void? This thinking is neither interesting nor worth pursuing. The existential despair that writers like Mark Fisher and David Foster Wallace felt while tragic and sympathetic must be placed aside at all costs. It is clear that there is no mass revolution coming as a malaise has infected nearly everyone alive today. The proletariat has largely been deposed of and their replacements spend their days running around like chickens with their heads cut off trying to ineffectually peck each other to death with bloodied stumps. Despite the current state of the world there are still possibilities and there are still options for those that want to stand and fight. There are still great designers and thinkers creating magic out of nothing and continuing the great traditions of the arts.

3 Herman Wakefield, an internet personality and furniture dealer observed that as our design has become dull, monochromatic, homogenized, and stagnant that advertising remains vibrant and colorful. The suggested psychological effect is that the consumers starved of colour will be more drawn to these online ads as they contrast so heavily with their physical environments. While both humorous and a little bit conspiratorial Wakefield is actually alluding towards a well-documented cultural phenomenon that has existed since the Greeks.

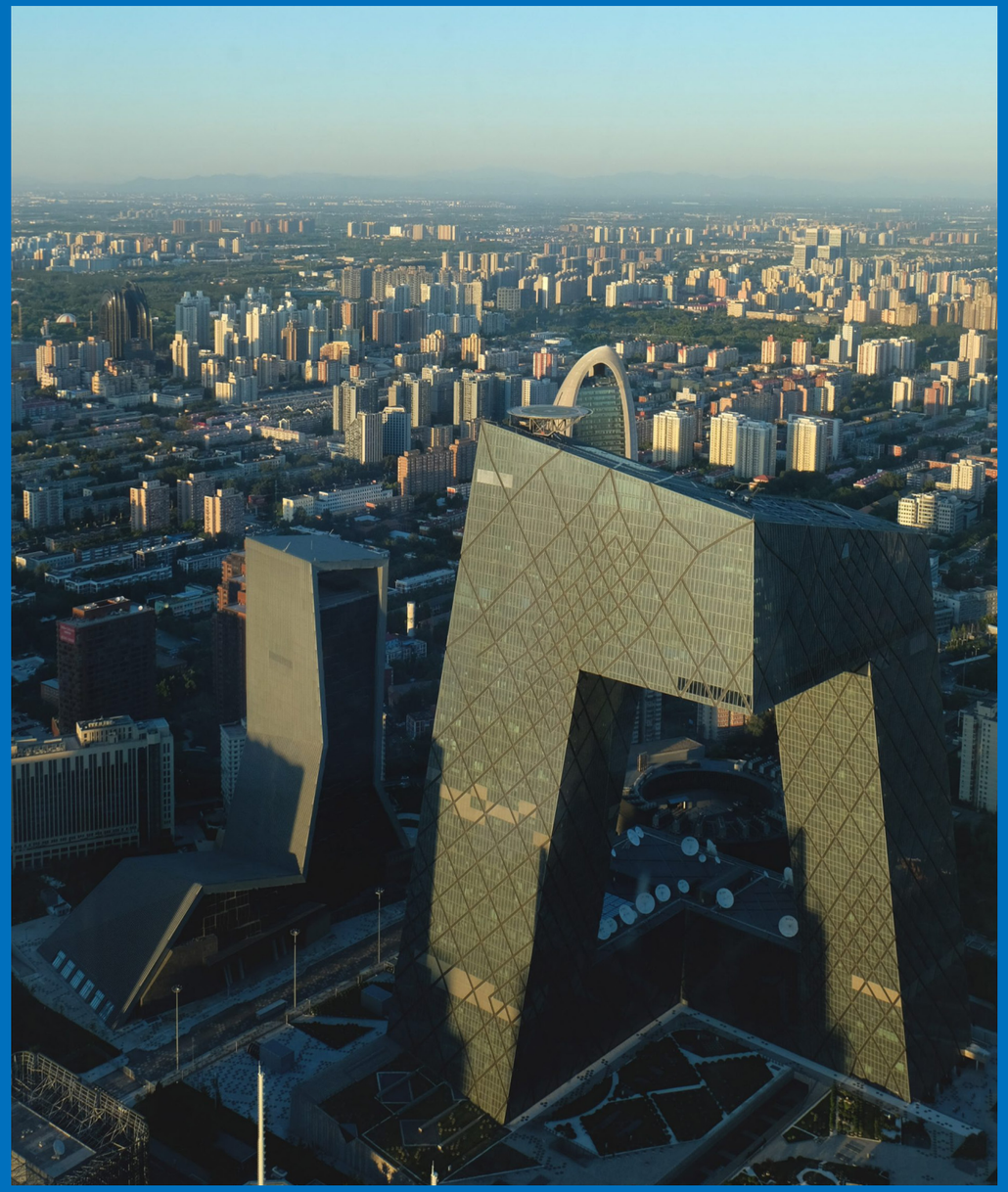
Chromophobia is a fear of corruption or contamination through colour that has existed in Western cultural and intellectual thought for the last 2500 years



The Zombie-mobile by Adrian Hanft, 2015

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Op-ed



CCTV Headquarters designed by OMA, 2004–2012

“Any single person living today is capable of taking up this mantle it is simply a matter of whether or not they will choose to do so.”

It’s true of fashion that the 2010s were dominated by designers like Demna Gvasalia, Virgil Abloh and Kanye West, architecture occupied by domineering blue glass facades, Zaha Hadid and public artworks that went nowhere such as the Hudson Yards Vessel. Yet pockets of resistance remain. Rem Koolhaas’s OMA continues to dazzle and amaze with projects that may not the be the biggest but certainly the most important. Multi disciplinarians like Faye Toogood have balanced their love of craftsmanship with postmodern design sensibilities and Raf Simon’s revival as a creative director alongside Miuccia Prada show that good design can still exist even in a world hostile to its very existence.

Where this leaves us is, unfortunately, a very individualist place for those of us who still love and have regard for design. It is possible that through our education - our education here meaning our aesthetic experience - to safeguard the tradition of good design and foster it into a new period and time. What this requires of course, is the eccentrics and the obsessives working in tandem to preserve what currently and historically existed and protecting it against those who seek to harm it. This is not meant to advocate for an aristocratic view of design against the current democratic order but for those individuals who are still interested in design to work with another to continue its lineage. Any single person living today is capable of taking up this mantle it is simply a matter of whether or not they will choose to do so. Are there enough among us living today who are capable of the discipline required to continue to create great things? This is impossible to know and only time will tell if we are able to be reminded of what was once possible and what is possible again. That said it is a far greater crusade to take up than the alternative, surrendering beautiful things to the primordial soup of contemporary culture. The old acid bath destroying any expectation or ability to think that we can create beautiful things. It is persistent, yet avoidable, but we need to make the conscious choice to oppose it.

Zizek suggested during the rise of populism that instilled the fear of God into our cultural elites and sent them into the decade-long tailspin we currently find ourselves in that the thinkers and academics return to their books and say nothing, speak of nothing (2022). Further he spoke of his conclusion that if in a democracy, the majority are compelled to vote for racist and sexist laws then emancipatory politics are not bound a priori to democratic procedures (Browne & Zizek, 2016). People quite often do not know what they want, or do not want what they know, or they simply want the wrong thing. Now it is the time to speak and to act against the sleeping majority who are listlessly wandering, not to exclude or harm them but to prevent aesthetic harm; to preserve, cultivate and grow the things that make life worth living. To remind ourselves that it's good to like things, to enjoy things and be passionate. To never give in to despair or cheap irony. Maybe then we will have an alternative vision of the future.

The Ectasy of Saint Theresa, Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1652

"Now it is the time to speak and to act against the sleeping majority who are listlessly wandering, not to exclude or harm them but to prevent aesthetic harm;

to preserve, cultivate and grow the things that make life worth living. To remind ourselves that it's good to like things, to enjoy things and be passionate".

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Op-ed

ALGORITHMIC SCORES

1920s

1960s

1970s

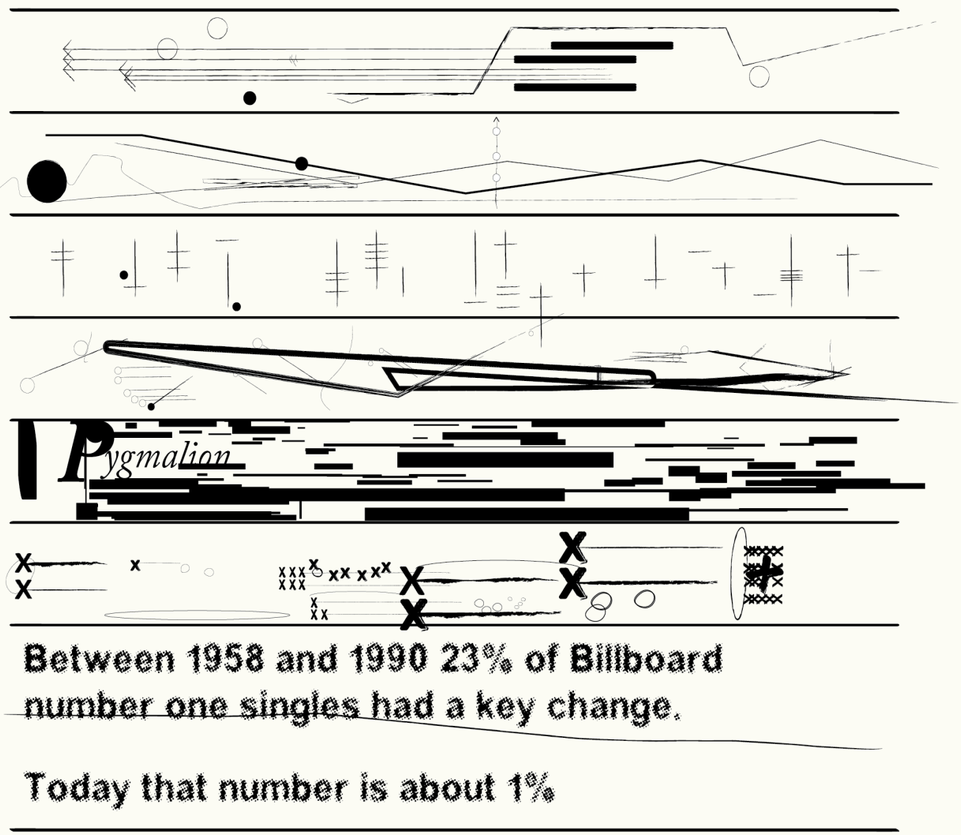
1980s

1990s

2000s

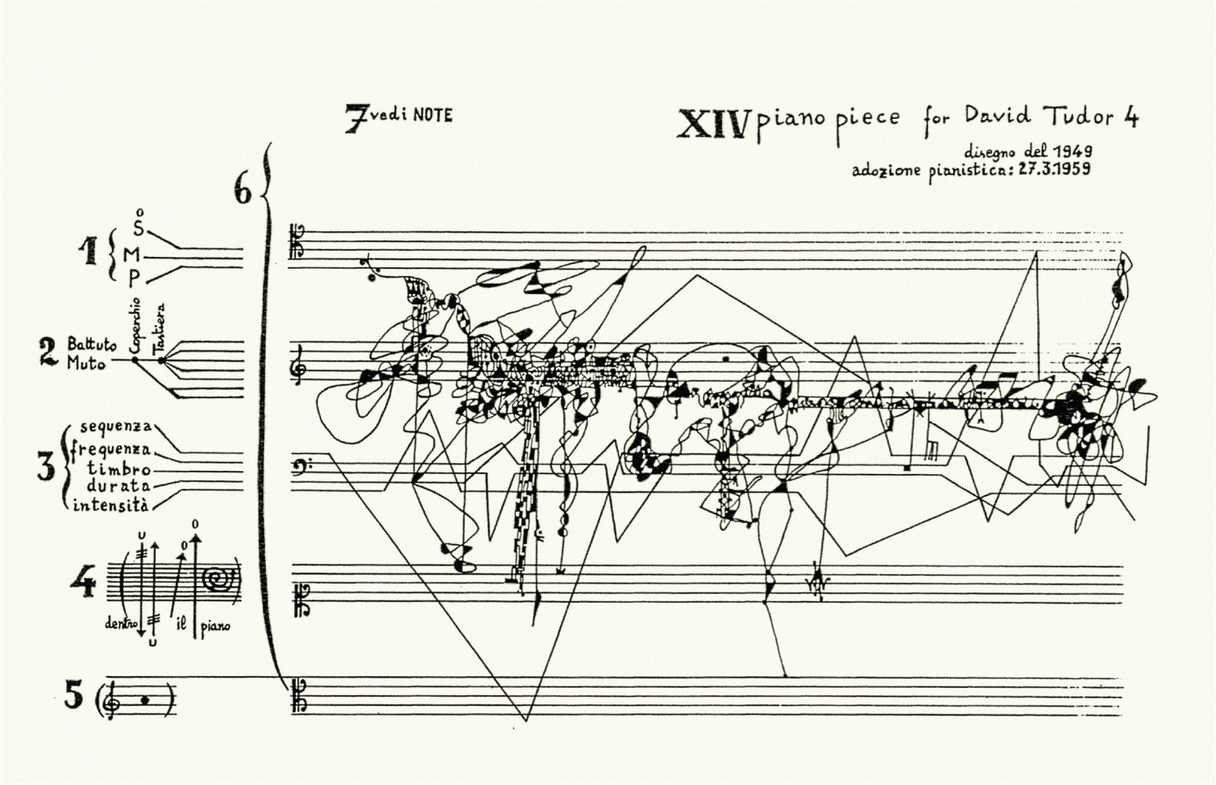
2010s

2020s



RHIZOMATIC SCORES

In the 20th century the Avant-Garde classical tradition was able to make use of the concept of Rhizomatic thinking, systems within systems, overlaying on top of another interacting in stochastic and aleatoric ways to create new kinds of art. Contrast this with the development of streaming services and machine learning. This form of technology can produce nothing new and has resulted in a destructive feedback loop. This affect appears most obviously in music as a flattened cardboard product perfectly interchangable via an algorithim with any other piece of content.



04.COMMUNICATION

Moving from point A to point B, action reaction, good thinking equals good writing. Axioms that define the larger concept of communication. McLuhan's Global Village, His 'medium is the message' more relevant than ever. Maybe too relevant, resisting globalism's sleight of hand today makes one liable to become a pariah or a leper. Yet in keeping with the now decayed Canadian Academic tradition oddly fitting. Instead of the harsh wilderness of the landscape (Klinck et al. 1965)the hostility comes from within our homes and institutions, from the inside of our pocket, its slithering tentacle reaching all.

How can one pass ideas to another in such an environment, when one is so tightly wound and chained how can we expect greatness? An impossible paradigm surely, yet one we've been operating under for 70 years now; putting people to death against another, riding them to see who can get a 1 percent leg up on their neighbors. To see who would sell their family or parents out to a cruel and callous peer group that neither cares if you live or die, tolerating nothing yet the most pernicious kind of loyalty to their home. The walls of which are constantly shifting.

And yet we persevere, the dedicated and the kind keep the old traditions alive, even as our mentors and heroes wither and no one seems capable of resuscitating their ideas. We manage to share the light that Prometheus stole and invigorate our souls even if our numbers are dwindling. Even if our language is reduced to grunts and hollers the basic truths are still evident.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Chapter

Manifesto for CCTV filmmakers

A feature of millennial-era art was anxiety over the encroachment of the biopolitical surveillance state in the early 2000s stemming from 9/11 and The Patriot Act. NATO-aligned countries followed with their own versions or conveniently decided to enforce or abandon the rule of law as politically expedient, as seen in Canada mere months ago. In comparison, the idea of a panopticon appears almost anthropocentric.

Banksy, D-Fuse, and Manu Luksch spearheaded an ultimately fruitless artistic attack on these infringements throughout the 2000s and early 2010s. While this art has aged out of style, Luksch's Manifesto for CCTV filmmakers serves as a stark reminder of the cognitive constraints that were to come.

Words by: Manu Luksch & Joseph Gleasure
Design by Joseph Gleasure

01. General

The filmmaker is not permitted to introduce any cameras or lighting into the location.

A protagonist (data subject) is required to feature in all sequences.

i. The documented activity of the protagonist must qualify as personal or sensitive data. The filmmaker establishes this by locating a CCTV camera and circumscribing the field of action for the actors relative to it, so that incidents of biographical relevance i.e., that reveal personal data in the frame.

ii. All people other than the protagonist ("third parties") will be rendered unidentifiable on the data obtained from the CCTV operators. Typically, operators blur or mask out faces of third parties. The filmmaker is to consider the visual impact of this manipulation, and to establish a rule for the handling of footage delivered with ineffectual masking or blurring-for example, reporting the offence.

03. Location

The filmmaker is to choose locations covered by multiple cameras operated by a large business, private security firm or public authority–or, if operated by a small retailer, cameras that can be panned or zoomed remotely. Locations may be mobile (e.g., public bus).

i. For every camera, the operator's name and contact details are to be noted.

04. Footage Requests

i. The subject access request letter is to state the place and time of the recording and include a picture of the protagonist (wearing the same clothes if possible) and a cheque for £10 (the maximum fee chargeable). Letters should be sent by a secure system that provides evidence of delivery. (Some data controllers may require the notarization of the letter to legally establish identity.)

ii. The filmmaker is to allow a maximum 40 days after sending the data request for an initial response.

iii. The filmmaker is to establish a set of rules for handling the various formats in which the data may be sent (video tape, DVD-video, digital files encoded with proprietary codecs, hard copies of frames, etc.).

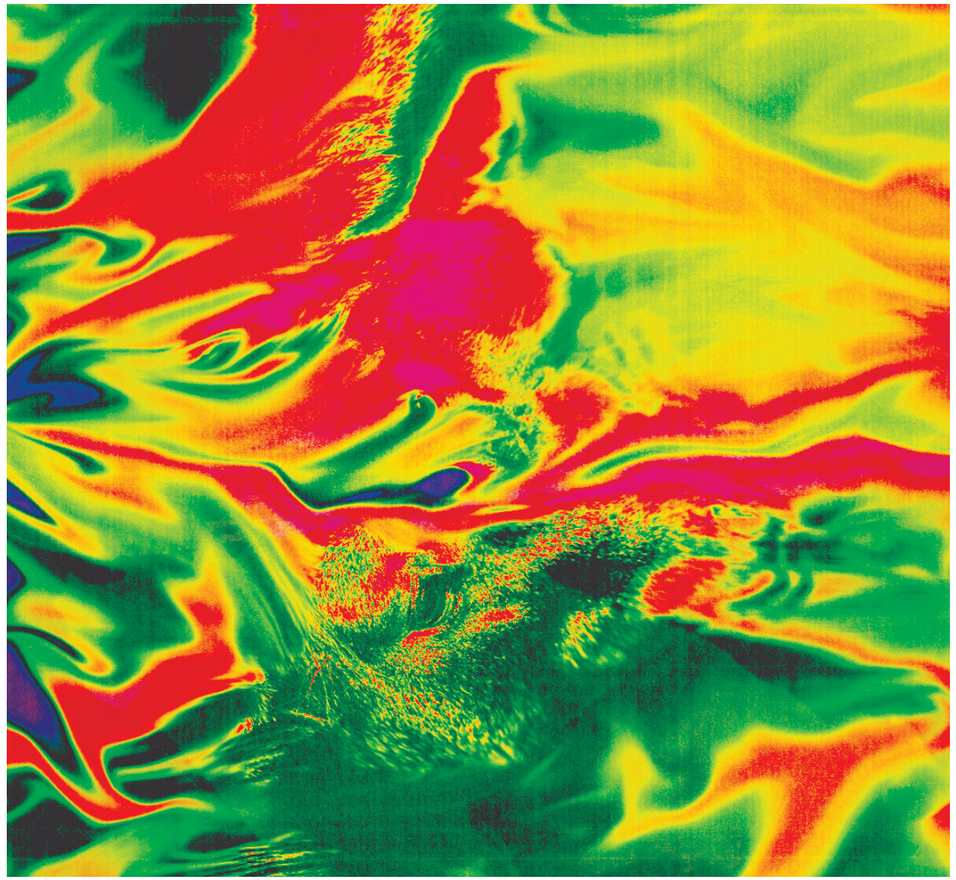
After each shoot, the filmmaker is to send a written request (subject access request letter) to the CCTV operator (data controller) to ensure that the data recovery process can be initiated while the recordings are still archived. (Mandatory retention periods vary.)

05. Sound

CCTV systems are not permitted to record sound. The filmmaker is to establish a set of rules for the soundtrack (if any) of the movie.

06. Distribution

Footage received is subject to complex copyright issues. The filmmaker is to take legal advice and establish a strategy.



WHEN THE HOUSE BURNS

Covid-19, Post-Modernism, Biopolitics, Denial, Epidemiology

Words by: Giorgio Agamben

‘Everything I do makes no sense if the house burns.’ Yet even as the house is burning, it is necessary to continue as always, to do everything with care and precision, perhaps even more studiously – even if no one should notice. It may be that life disappears from the earth, that no memory remains of what has been done, for better or for worse. But you continue as before, it is too late to change, there is no more time.

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Op-ed

'What's happening around you is no longer your business.' Like the geography of a country that you have to leave forever. Yet how does it still affect you? Right now, when it's no longer your business, when everything seems over, everything and every place appear in their truest guise, somehow touch you more closely, just as they are: splendour and misery.

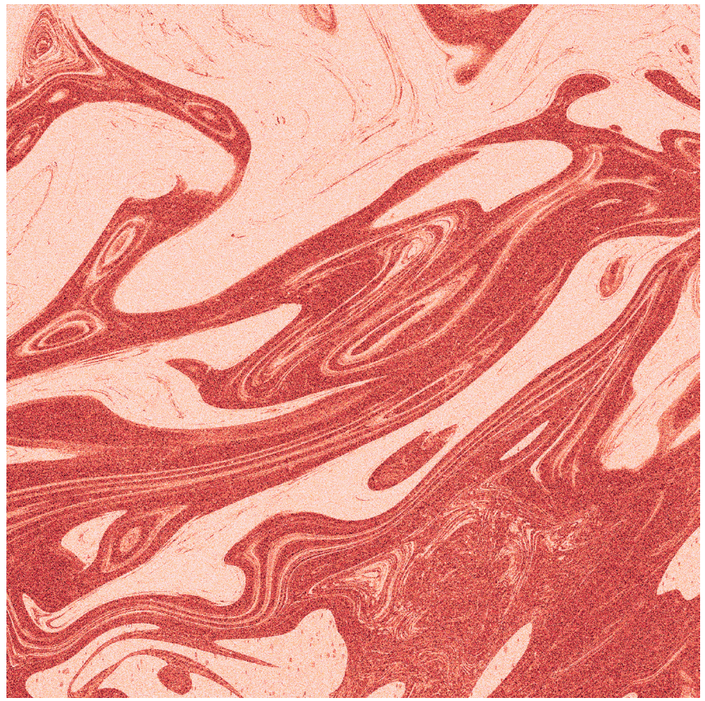
Philosophy, a dead language. "The language of poets is always a dead language ... Curious to say: a dead language that is used to give more life to thought." Maybe not a dead language, but a dialect. That philosophy and poetry speak in a language that is less than language, this is the measure of their rank, of their special vitality. Weighing, judging the world by the measure of a dialect, of a language that is dead and yet springs anew, in which not even a comma can be changed. Keep speaking this dialect, now that the house is burning.

Which house is burning? The country where you live, or Europe, or the whole world? Perhaps the houses, the cities have already burned down — we do not know for how long — in a single huge funeral pyre, which we pretended not to see. In some, only fragments of the house remain, a frescoed wall, a fragment of the roof, some names — many names, already devoured by the fire. And yet we cover them so carefully with white plaster and false words that they seem to be intact. We live in houses, in cities, that are burning from bottom to top, as if they were still standing; people pretend to live there and go out into the street, masked among the ruins, as if they were still the familiar neighbourhoods of the past.

And now the flame has changed its shape and nature, having become digital, invisible and cold; but, precisely for this reason, it is even closer, it is upon us and surrounds us at every moment.

That a civilisation — a barbarism — collapses so as not to rise again: this has already happened, and historians are accustomed to marking and dating ruptures and ruins. But how can we bear witness to a world that is going to ruin with eyes blindfolded and face covered, to a republic that collapses without its sanity or pride, in abjection and fear? The blindness is all the more desperate because the survivors demand they govern their own ruin, and swear that everything can be controlled technically, that there is no need for a new god or a new sky — only regulations, experts and doctors. Panic and deceit.

"Men must be mobilised — must feel in a state of emergency at every moment, regulated in detail by those who have the power to declare it.



But while mobilisation was in the past meant to bring men closer, now it aims to isolate and distance them from each other."

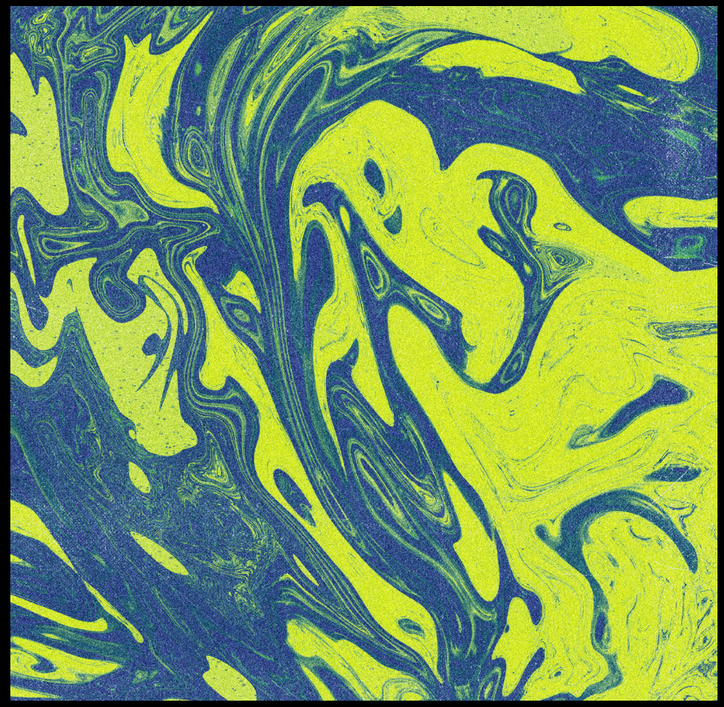
What would a God be to whom neither prayers nor sacrifices were offered? And what would a law be that knew neither command nor execution? And what is a word that has neither meaning nor command, but is truly held 'in the beginning' — indeed before it?

A culture that in the end feels lifeless tries to govern its ruin as best it can through a state of permanent exception. The total mobilisation in which Ernst Jünger saw the essential character of our time must be seen from this perspective. Men must be mobilised — must feel in a state of emergency at every moment, regulated in detail by those who have the power to declare it. But while mobilisation was in the past meant to bring men closer, now it aims to isolate and distance them from each other.

How long has the house been burning? How long has it been burning? Certainly a century ago, between 1914 and 1918, something happened in Europe that threw everything that appeared to still be intact and alive into the flames and madness; then once again, thirty years later, the fires broke out everywhere, and since then the house has never ceased to burn, without respite, subdued, and barely visible under the ashes. But perhaps the fire began much earlier, when humanity's blind impulse towards salvation and progress joined the power of fire and machines. All this is known and need not be repeated. Instead, we need to ask ourselves how we could continue to live and think while everything burned, what remained intact in the middle of the pyre or on its edges. How did we manage to breathe in the flames, what did we lose, and to what ruin — or to what imposture — did we cling? And now, when there are no more flames, but only numbers, figures and lies, we are certainly weaker and more alone, but without possible compromises, lucid as never before.

If the fundamental architectural problem only becomes visible when the house is in flames, then you can see now what is at stake in the history of the West, what it has tried at all costs to grasp, and why it could only fail.

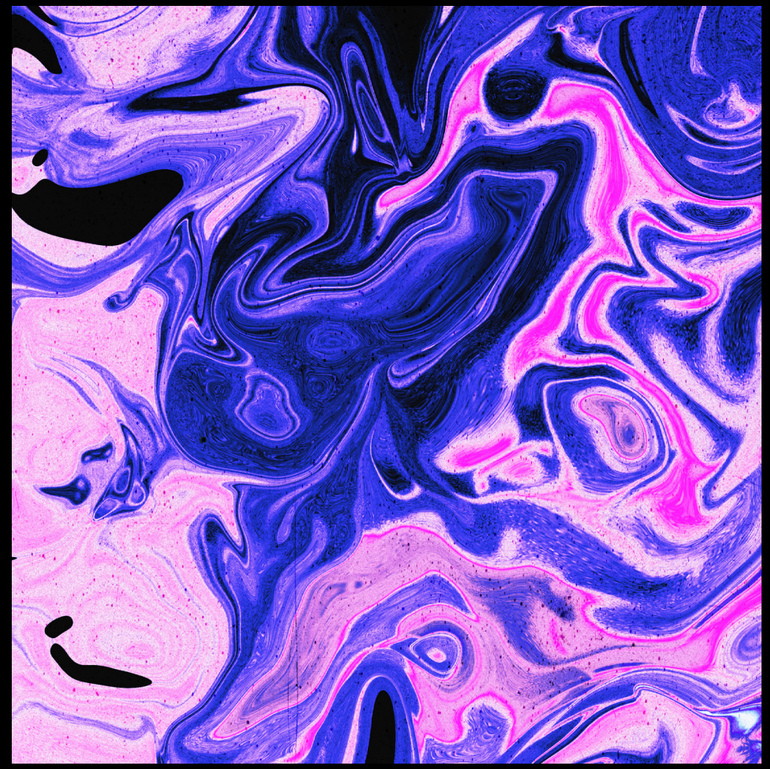
It is as if power were trying to grasp, whatever the cost, the bare life it produced, and yet — no matter how hard it tries to appropriate and control that life with every possible device, no longer just the police but also medical and technological — bare life cannot but escape it, because it is by definition elusive. Governing bare life is the madness of our time. Men reduced to their pure biological existence, when the government of men and the government of things merge, are no longer human.



“Governing bare life is the madness of our time. Men reduced to their pure biological existence, when the government of men and the government of things merge, are no longer human.”

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Op–ed



*‘ **Buffaloes and horses** have four legs: that’s what I call Heaven. Haltering the horses, piercing the buffalo’s nostrils: that’s what I call human.*

This is why I say:
take care that the human does not destroy Heaven within you, take care the intentional does not destroy the celestial .’

The other house, the one in which I will never be able to live but which is my real home; the other life, the one I did not live while I thought I was living it; the other language, which I spelled syllable by syllable without ever being able to speak it — so much mine that I can never have them... When thought and language divide, one believes that one can speak while forgetting that one is speaking. Poetry and philosophy, when they speak, do not forget that they are speaking — they remember their language. If we remember our language, if we do not forget that we can speak, then we are freer, we are not forced into things and rules. Language is not a tool: it is our face, the openness in which we are.

The face is the most human of things. Man has a face and not simply a muzzle or a front, because he dwells in openness, because in his face he exposes himself and communicates. This is why the face is the place of politics. Our unpolitical time does not want to see its own face, it keeps it at a distance, masks and covers it. There must be no more faces, but only numbers and figures. The tyrant, too, is faceless.

Feeling alive: being affected by one’s own sensibilities, being delicately assigned to one’s gesture without being able either to assume or avoid it. Feeling myself alive makes life possible for me, even if I were locked in a cage. And nothing is as real as this possibility.

In the years to come, there will only be monks and criminals. And yet, it is not possible simply to step aside, to believe that one can scramble free of the rubble of the world that has collapsed around us. Because the collapse affects us and addresses us, because we too are rubble. And we will have to learn carefully how to work with them in a fairer way, without being noticed.

Ageing: ‘ growing only in the roots, no longer in the branches ’. Sink into the roots, no more flowers or leaves. Or, rather, like a drunken butterfly flying over what has been lived. There are still branches and flowers in the past. And you can still draw honey from them.

That the soul and the body are indissolubly linked — this is spiritual. The spirit is not a third between the soul and the body: it is only their helpless, wonderful coincidence. Biological life is an abstraction, and it is this abstraction that power claims to govern and cure.

For us, alone, there can be no salvation: there is salvation because there are others. And this is not for moral reasons, because I should act for their good. Only because I am not alone is there salvation: I can only save myself as one among many, as another among others. Alone — and this is the special truth of loneliness — I do not need salvation; indeed, I am truly unsavable. Salvation is the dimension that opens up because I am not alone, because there is plurality and multitude. God, incarnate, has ceased to be unique, has become one man among many. Because of this, Christianity has had to bind itself to history and follow its fate to the end; and when history, as appears to happen today, fades and rots, then Christianity too is approaching its sunset. Its irreversible contradiction is that Christianity sought, in history and through history, a salvation beyond history, and when that history ends the ground beneath its feet is missing. The Church was actually in solidarity not with salvation but with the history of salvation, and since it sought salvation through history it could only end in medicine. And when the time came, the Church did not hesitate to sacrifice salvation to medicine.

Salvation must be torn from its historical context, and a non-historical plurality must be found, a plurality as a way out of history.

Escaping a place or situation without entering other territories; leaving an identity and a name without adopting others. We can only regress towards the present, while in the past we advanced in a straight line. What we call the past is merely our long regression to the present. Separating us from our past is the first resource of power.

What frees us from the burden is our breath. In our breath we are weightless, we are propelled as if in flight beyond the force of gravity.

We will have to learn again from the beginning how to judge, but with a judgement that neither punishes nor rewards, neither absolves nor condemns. An act without purpose, that removes existence from any purpose, necessarily unjust and false. Merely an interruption, an instant poised between time and eternity, in which the image of a life without end or projects, without name or memory — because it saves itself, not in eternity, but in a 'kind of eternity'. A judgment without pre-established criteria, and yet precisely because of this political, because it restores life to its naturalness.

Feeling and to feel, sensation and self-affection, are contemporaries. In every sensation there is a feeling of feeling, in every sensation of oneself a feeling of otherness, a friendship and a face.

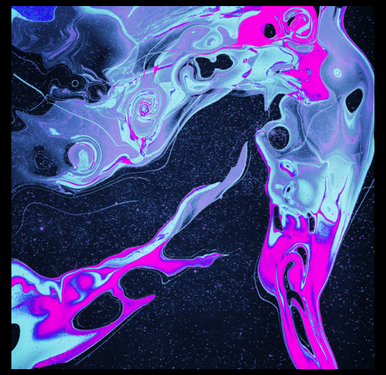
Reality is the veil through which we perceive what is possible, what we can or cannot do.

Knowing which of our childhood wishes have been fulfilled is not easy. Above all, if the part of the fulfilled that borders on what can't be granted is enough to make us accept going on living. One is afraid of death because the part of the unfulfilled desires has grown without any possible measure.

Language remains in the burning house. Not language, but the immemorial, prehistoric, weak forces that guard and remember it: philosophy and poetry. And what do they keep, what do they remember of language? Not this or that meaningful proposition, not this or that article of faith or bad faith. Rather, the very fact that there is language, that without a name we are open in the name, and that in this openness, in a gesture, in a face, we are unknowable and exposed.

Poetry: the word is the only thing we have left from when we still didn't know how to speak, an obscure song within the language, a dialect or an idiom which we cannot fully understand, but to which we cannot help but listen — even if the house burns, even if in their burning language men continue to talk nonsense.

But is there a language of philosophy, just as there is a language of poetry? Like poetry, philosophy dwells in language as a part of it, and only the manner of this dwelling distinguishes it from poetry. Two tensions in the field of language, which intersect at one point and then tirelessly separate. And whoever says a right word, a simple word that springs anew, abides in this tension. Whoever realises that the house is burning can be tempted to look with disdain and contempt at his fellow



men, who appear not to notice the flames. Yet is it not these men, who do not see and do not think, that will be the lemurs to whom you will have to give an account on the final day? Realising that the house is on fire does not raise you above the others; on the contrary, it is with them that you will have to exchange a last look as the flames get closer. What can you say to justify your claims of conscience to these men who are so unaware that they seem almost innocent?

In the burning house you continue to do what you did before — but you cannot help but see that the flames show you naked now. Something has changed, not in what you do, but in the way you let it go into the world. A poem written in the burning house is more just and true, because no one will be able to listen to it, because nothing guarantees that it will escape the flames. But if, by chance, it finds a reader, then he will in no way escape the address that calls him from that helpless, inexplicable, subdued shouting.

Only those who have no chance of being heard can tell the truth; only those who speak from a house relentlessly consumed by the flames surrounding them. Man disappears today, like a face in the sand erased on the shore. But what takes its place no longer has a world, only a naked life, silent and without history, at the mercy of the calculations of power and science. But perhaps it is only starting from this destruction that something else may one day slowly or suddenly appear — not a god, of course, but not even another man — a new animal, perhaps, an otherwise living soul.

"Only those who have no chance of being heard can tell the truth; only those who speak from a house relentlessly consumed by *the flames surrounding them.*"

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking
Op–ed

Wild Horses, Argentina, 1958 by Rene Burri

Wild Horse, Argentina, 1958 by Rene Burri

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

Words by Ken Johnson
Design by Joseph Gleasure

From a distance, Mark Lombardi's beautiful, finely penciled drawings look like star charts. Up close, however, one sees that his perfect circles and networks of arcing lines connect points labeled with names like Oliver North, George Bush, Bill Clinton; many less famous businessmen, military men, politicians or crime figures, and organizations like the C.I.A., the Lippo Group or the World Finance Corporation.

Each drawing purports to diagram in dizzying detail the constellation of people and grou money and influence lie behind internati like the Iran-contra operation nt contributions to Mr. Clinton's ign or the collapse of savings an

Using only major news sources, who was an inter unt ago, in informa t are uncon most citizens. As d drawings are fasc to offer such int story of the tel acquisition of in Zaire.

But ng as wo The a expandin five fee gest an e apparent chaos, like the nov or John le Carre, they exud of paranoia. It's thrilling hidden, labyrinthine struc power that Mr. Lombardi s

Full text on page 197

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Graphics

FRACTALS OF THE SELF

reflections on communication in the digital age

Atomization, Social Media, Social Recession, Silicon Valley

Words by: Joseph Gleasure

RIMOWA 「As Seen By」, 2021

Every little kid wants a computer in his pocket
The trophies are on the mantels of the digital prophets
The internet is bigger than Jesus and John Lennon
And nobody wants to know where we're headed
– Chinese Fountain, The Growlers.

Somewhat contre l'espirt to their profession, technology company executives have long been known to raise their children tech-free or with what many would consider extreme limits to screen time (Lopez,2020). Perhaps being so familiar with their products, CEOs understand the harm they are inflicting upon humanity and do not wish that same harm to come to their loved ones. It's a bit like a pharmaceutical company declaring itself against OxyContin despite profiting well into the billions (Haas,2022). Like the tech CEO, I understand some of the harms of social media despite making a living in this field. In some regards, it is an incredible tool that has enabled an unprecedented level of information to be spread and shared, but that has grown out of what McLuhan called an information economy wherein we need a credit card that is information itself (Carson & McLuhan, 2011). However, simultaneously and somewhat mimicking the rise of personal credit resulting in untold levels of personal debt (The Canadian Press, 2022), the integration of media into the human body and everyday life has had untold second-order effects that we are only now beginning to identify, never mind reckon with. To put it more simply and to perhaps invoke a cliched millennial description of technology:

- we are more connected than ever yet have never been more disconnected and alone.

I have seen firsthand how social media alienates people and destroys self-esteem; if past generations had a frenetic rat race to establish themselves in the world, ours is an all-consuming digital avalanche that situates itself as a house of mirrors collapsing inwards on top of us. We are not only competing literally against our peers in our neighbourhoods, our towns, cities, and countries but against ourselves, fractals of ourselves, and every single person alive today. While in the 1990s, it was normal for CEOs to warn against unforeseen consequences and the flattening of culture globalization (Marzano, 1998) I doubt even they could have foreseen the horrors social media has inflicted upon humanity.[1]

Michael Heizer City, 1970–2022
Jamie Hawkesworth for The New Yorker

1 Elon Musk, in late January 2023 announced the introduction of a feature that would automatically translate and push popular content in other languages onto the Twitter timeline (The Hindu Bureau). A feature that would likely only increase this lattening effect. Further, pundit Matthew Yglesias once argued for the need of 1 billion American citizens (2020), but looking around the internet, it is clear there already are 1 billion Americans. Who live and die by the consumption of American culture, politics, and media. Has it ever occurred to either Musk or Yglesias that breaking down the firewalls of culture is neither desirable nor wanted? That it has only resulted in the homogenization of culture?

VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Op-Ed

The sheer existential weight of being weighed against a communications professional in India getting paid a tenth of my salary or a 16-year-old prodigy in Silicon Valley who will go on to make a hundred times my salary is an unbearable phenomenon for most, and we reap the fruits of this every single day. People are more impotent, miserable, sick, mentally ill, disconnected, alienated, and alone despite living at the point in human history where abundance has never been more plentiful (at least on paper)(World Bank, 2022). While we're not quite at post-scarcity levels of resources, there is a restlessness that exists, especially in the west. An unease caused directly by a technology that most of us keep attached to our hip throughout the day if not glued to our eyes.

What is meant by social media in this essay is any of the sites, apps, and devices that are currently and have historically sought to augment or replace any aspect of social human interaction. Social in the sense of casual or intimate relations between individuals and groups not expressly designed for commerce or other business means. Something like Onlyfans is a social media site, but email isn't necessarily so. Onlyfans' success lies in the fact that their creators seek to replace or emulate a social relationship. The fomenting of parasocial bonds and relationships mediated through computers to generate income. In an equally disruptive way, YouTube is as popular as it is because it functions identically to a site like Onlyfans, as parasocial bonds are intrinsic to its structure. Meanwhile, email itself is a simple correspondence program that replaces physical mailboxes and doesn't-necessarily supplement or augments genuine human relationships. Social media replaces a relationship between humans. Email replaces an object that facilitates communication between humans.

"Social media replaces a relationship between humans."

the loneliness of I

Hermann Broch,
The Sleepwakers, 1930

miserable wicked me howy interesting I am

W.H. Auden,
The Age of Anxiety, 1948

Social media, while arguably existing in various forms before the internet, was only able to reach the levels of prominence it did because of what was happening in the very early days of the internet. In the 1990s, academics and designers influenced by thinkers like Deleuze and Guattari became interested in the concept of wearable electronics (MIT Media Lab, 2005), not quite cybernetics or cyborg-like technology, but certainly a tangible precursor. At the heart of their ideas was the concept of nomadology, people who do not have a fixed place in a system (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986). Of course, being designers and not philosophers, they tended to apply this idea quite literally. Wearable electronics were supposed to aid literal 'nomads' or people who lived transiently and without their own fixed space throughout the day (think of commuters or remote workers). Eventually, this led to creations in the early 2000s like the Levi's ICD+ line or Burton Analog collection that featured clothing with integrated electronics (Gleasure, 2020). This was seen as an incredible design triumph to aid the changing nature of contemporary society. Instead, what happened is that they unintentionally led to the creation of quasi-cyborgs. The development of enterprise-level purpose-built communication devices that were even more invasive than the fax machines, phones, and pagers of the previous decades showed up in the form of smartphones.

Michael Heizer City, 1970–2022
Joe Rome for Dezeen

"social media has facilitated the rapid transfer of information into a commodity in a way that no other technology has"

The ubiquity of smartphones led to the rise of social media itself by making it instantly accessible rather than an activity that you had to physically change your current arrangement to access. The simple act of having to go and sit down at a computer and log in to a site like Myspace versus having virtually unlimited access to it wherever you went completed the bond of man and machine in a way that the early designers of wearables could have only dreamed of.

It appears that some indigenous cultures were rightfully worried about having their picture taken by a camera. Their reasoning may have come from strange and superstitious places. Still, they were able to intuit that having your picture taken and potentially radically altered by technology distorted the self in a way that depictions by hand do not. As we see, this is all too true in social media. The camera or the iPhone may be the physical device that stores the image, but social media is the environment that most readily contextualizes the image and the user's identity.

Social media's contextualization of imagery and identity is foremostly realized through endless commodification. While social media is not the only or the first way this had happened (after all, Baudrillard was speaking about this years before social media even existed (1987)), social media has facilitated the rapid transfer of information into a commodity like no other technology has. It is the vessel through which humans themselves are transformed into a dual consumer of products and products themselves, which in turn causes significant physical and psychological damage to the user.

Literally in the sense that most, if not all, social media is set up explicitly as a marketplace or area of commerce. Instagram and Facebook have e-commerce and classifieds built into them, which as previously defined would have disqualified them as strictly social media platforms however, this is a very small but profitable part of each site's model. An overwhelming amount of sales are generated through these platforms and what makes them valuable to marketers and businesses is not their selling features but the fact that social media acts as validation for brands. From the personal or small business to the multi-national B2B conglomerate these sites through like counts, followers, and dissemination of polished editorial pictures ranging from your high school classmates' dream vacation photos to a highly stylized fashion shoot for Vogue or Architectural Digest. These sites sell aspiration like nothing ever has.

Cover of Super-Cannes: A Novel
by J.G. Ballard, 2002

how about
i sleep a bit
longer and
forget all this
nonsense?
Gregor Samsa,
The Metamorphosis, 1915
by Franz Kafka

maybe everyone
has a similiar story;
mishearing,mispeaking
The Scientist,
Tycho's Nova, 2001
by Graham Wood

Then, of course, there are the physical consequences of social media; constantly being exposed to the blue light of screens leads to physical effects like eye strain and headaches, and spending hours on end logged into a highly stimulating environment destroys attention spans. It is likely inducing disorders like ADHD at a scale never seen before. In one particularly disturbing video[2] a child is seen playing a game on an iPad with one hand while scrolling on his phone in the other. Imagine what 18 years of this does to someone. We are already seeing the effects of what replacing the normal socialization methods of children with computer screens and social media has done throughout the lockdown. It makes a JG Ballard novel look like a pasture of flowers and sunshine. This is to say nothing of what adults subjected to this physical barrage have endured.

Depression, mental illness, and physical decline were exacerbated throughout Covid (WHO, 2022), but a new dimension to this suffering was brought on through the psychological assault users had to endure on social media. The obliteration of identity, a process that was already ongoing but accelerated greatly by the advent of this technology, reached a new level of prevalence in our lives. Thinking of social media as a technological extension of forms of communication and thus implicitly controlling communication helps makes sense of this. As one Twitter user pointed out that she had read a book about overpopulation and decided not to have kids, reached 50, and realized it was an info hazard far too late to correct course; on social media, the effect of info hazards are amplified infinitely.

Perhaps, the more dangerous aspect of social media is how it furthers the reduction of identity into cells in a marketer's spreadsheet. For any possible facet or constituent element of a person, you can imagine there is a team of junior marketers, underpaid interns, or gig labour slaves in India figuring out how to monetize this for capitalists. As mentioned earlier this is a theme Baudrillard explored many decades ago in his book America (1987). This process of commodifying identity isn't something new, but at this current point in time, it is primarily achieved through the use of social media. Baudrillard explains that consumption habits are increasingly granular in America at the end of the 1970s.

"For any possible facet or constituent element of a person, you can imagine there is a team of junior marketers, underpaid interns, or gig labour slaves in India figuring out how to monetize it."

Cover of America by Jean Baudrillard, 2010, Verso Books

2 https://web.archive.org/web/20230408181930/https://twitter.com/coldhealing/status/1618646716156383233

He uses the example of sexuality and the absence of difference in post-modern America stating "bound up with a decline in the display of sexual characteristics. The outer signs of masculinity are tending towards zero but so are the signs of femininity. It is in this conjecture that we have seen new idols emerging…' gender benders' neither masculine or feminine…Boy George, Michael Jackson, David Bowie…for want of an identity most of them have gone in search of a 'gender model'…a 'look' based on clothes or a 'look' based on cells…The question of difference is more crucial than that of pleasure…. Pushed to its logical conclusions, this would leave neither masculine nor feminine, but a dissemination of individual sexes referring only to themselves, each one managed as an independent enterprise… everyone will seek to develop their optimum programme. Everyone will have their code, their formula. But also their 'look', their image" (1987)

In a contemporary sense, this idea of everyone having their "optimum programme" or an individually defined code, formula, or look is a marketer's dream. This individual formula is defined through the consumption of products used to attempt to define oneself. It's not merely enough to own a phone or a laptop it has to be an iPhone a Macbook to the point that consumption begins to replace identity itself. In essence, you are what you eat!

In social media, there is even a self-awareness of the phenomenon through the emergence of the memes of the NPC (Don, 2018) and the Consoomer (Phillip, 2019). Both are nightmarish post-modern constructions and satirizations (although more and more looking like simple observations) of 'A Type Of Person' you're likely to encounter in digital space. The NPC originally described people who lacked an 'inner dialogue' but evolved to describe people who are indistinguishable from a preprogrammed nonplayable character (NPC) in a video game repeating thoughts and ideas that were fed to them by some part of the media apparatus unable to form an original thought on their own.

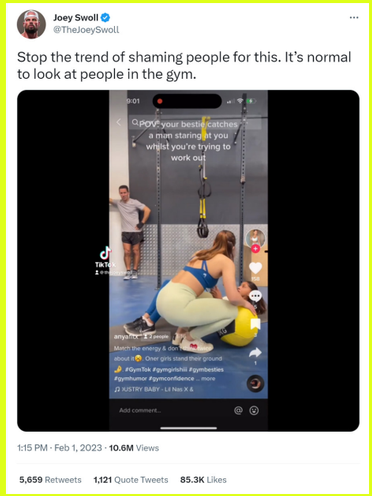
Meanwhile, the 'Consoomer' is someone who endlessly and mindlessly consumes products usually lowbrow pop culture items aimed at children. Originally it was used to make fun of adults that still get excited over things like Marvel and Harry Potter but has expanded and been used to describe people who consume things because other people have approved of them online. In both cases, these characters present people as amalgamations of other people's ideas, people who develop their personality and identity from consuming products (and as we know from earlier Information is a product).

Michael Heizer City, 1970-2022
Jamie Hawkesworth for The New Yorker

Additionally, social media leads to a fractalled self where people act radically differently depending on what part of the internet or reality, they are in. While a version of this has probably existed for as long as humans have existed via what we call code-switching today the scale and frequency at which people undergo this process is exponentially greater because of social media. This combined with Hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1994), and the love of simulation has created one of the most bizarre social phenomena I've ever observed. I've come across various fashion circles online where there are young men (I'm sure this affects women as well albeit slightly differently) who develop massive collections and wardrobes of clothing they never wear or never wear outside of their house. Cultivating an entirely false (simulated) identity based on the consumption of designer clothing. The posting of a photo of their outfit to a community of like-minded individuals which normally presents itself as the justification behind these spending habits becomes secondary to the act of purchasing items for validation in online circles. In one particularly extreme group chat dedicated to the brand Acronym, users of a discord server were compelled to post monthly receipts of their purchases of the brand to prove they were serious enough to be a member. This of course led to several members taking on thousands of dollars of credit card debt to continue to participate in a scene that had been reduced to vulgar consumerism.

Reducing identity to a commodity social media further destroys human interaction by taking advantage of the increasingly low-trust western society it operates in (Putnam, 2007) and replacing interaction with "handy market solutions". This has negative effects on all manner of human relations via the commodification of social relations as the digital plane becomes strictly regimented and proscribed as a space with one specific meaning. i.e. LinkedIn becomes the space for professional networking, Tinder becomes the space for approaching the opposite sex, and so on.

Third-wave feminists have long complained about unwanted advances from men which I think is reasonable (Pagilia, 1992), but social media has melded perverse incentive structures within its information economy resulting in some undesirable outcomes. There was a recurring format of video posted online throughout the 2010s by third-wave feminists documenting the catcalls they would receive walking through major cities (Bliss, 2014) in addition to the moral panic of sexual assault on university campuses in the last decade and the fact young men were dropping out of society in droves (Lalljee, 2022) created a market opening here for social media not only in the fact that a content creator could 1. Gain capital by exaggerating or outright lying about these experiences which as a phenomenon happened and continues to happen. 2. Incentive anti-social behaviors, thereby formalizing them and making them appear 'normal' if not outright condoned or supported by society at large.



Observe two current trends in social media, the first: female influencers working out in the gym(often provocatively or in an unorthodox manner to draw attention) stochastically accusing nearby men of leering at them to gain clicks and attention online. This has led to some highly embarrassing incidents where the men are then defended by other members of the gym (oftentimes women themselves) and these influencers are retroactively exposed as charlatans to the members of the gym (of course by this point the damage is irreparable, as so often happens with irresponsibly spreading a media narrative) the second: young men harassing women on Tiktok with the seemingly innocuous meme "is it pink"

"identity is commodified and turned back on the user by showing them aspirational content which drives insecurity and unhappiness.

where they speculate about the colour of a female user's genitals with frightening attention to detail. Both examples are particularly nefarious because there is a plausible deniability built into their structure for the gym influencer they have the benefit of seemingly standing up for women in public spaces a worthy and noble cause, but subverting it by lying and manipulating It for personal gain. For teenage boys their sexual harassment can be seen as an immature expression of youthful exuberance. In both cases the normalization of antisocial tendencies is rewarded via likes and views.

Consider the alternative provided by social media[3]; men (and women) are no longer approaching each other in public (Noenickx, 2022) at the rates they previously did for various reasons one of which is that the digital plane has amplified rejection and the fear of cold approaches by the possibility of being filmed, rejected and then mocked by millions of people online.[4] This lead to (or stemmed from, the end result is the same) tightly controlled digital spaces and channels that are 'appropriate' to approach the opposite sex through. Dating apps are a particularly nefarious form of social media that destroys organic human connection and attract and helps reduce even dating to pseudo-free market forces wherein more people are miserable, less people are having sex, but a small, small, small percentage are having more sex than ever. Via Onlyfans and similar sites erotic attraction becomes a strictly regimented commodity[5], the human body itself becomes debased entirely and commodified,[6] Via dating apps normal romantic relations are reduced to a commodity or subjected to 'market forces'. Via normative social medias site's identity is commodified and turned back on the user by showing them aspirational content which drives insecurity and unhappiness.

3 See also the terribly depressing Social Recession By The Numbers by Anton Cebalo.

We have fewer friends and relationships and experience delayed adulthood. Cebalo cites a Putnam study from 2000 that deals intensely with the increasingly rapid breakdown of social relations in the USA to the point where even the title 'Bowling Alone' is a dated term a mere twenty years onwards. I then came across Putnam's 2006 'E Pluribus Unum' which, much to the author's and prevailing liberal establishments' dismay, showed that diversity in communities and neighborhoods had incredibly negative consequences on the residents. Whether this is causal or not and the object-level content is largely uninteresting to me however, the continuing rapid deterioration of social relationships seems to be an ongoing trend for the last 50 years and only been amplified by social media, which adds its own pathologies and symptoms, onto the users.

4 Although it's easy to laugh at them, there has been hundreds if not thousands of tiktoks, articles, and social media articles by women complaining that they never get approached in public anymore. Combine this with the fact that as of 2018 28% of young men and 18% of young women (18-29) hadn't had sex in the last year(no doubt these numbers are greater since Covid-19) (Julian, 2018) It's clear that the incentives social media has made so alluring have all but destroyed the spirit of young people.

5 See also Leila Mechoi's Sex Work: Not real work, not real sex, 2020.

6 The unspoken part of the subversion on which Onlyfans relies on is much like the implicit unspoken reverse of statements like 'all art is political', in that subversion relies upon that which it subverts. In the case of 'all art is political is its opposite is that 'all political sentiments are apolitical' in both cases the principle it espouses is rendered impotent.

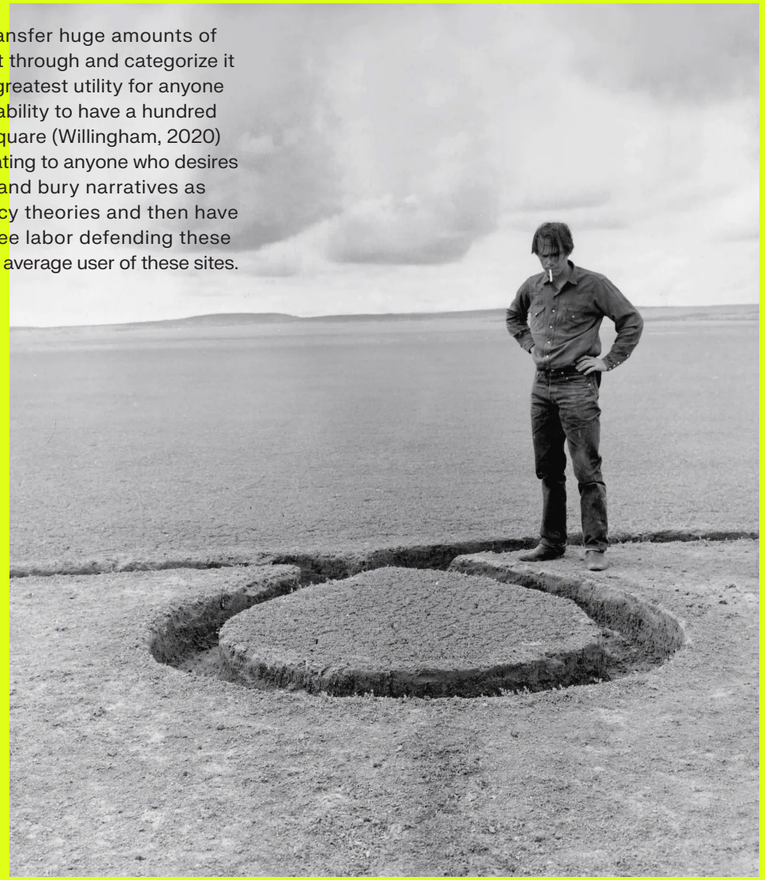
It helps to remember in both situations the people espousing such 'principles' are acting as recruiters.

Michael Heizer City, 1970–2022
Jamie Hawkesworth for The New Yorker

"careers built on driving resentment and alienation is simply a result of the perverse incentives built into the structure of social media itself."

Of course, this isn't the fault of feminists wanting to feel safe in public or young women selling their bodies for money, this is caused by the amplifying effect social media has on information and it's attempt to replicate all manner of human relationships. That cynical (or in many cases naive do-gooders) leveraged social media into careers built on driving resentment and alienation is simply a result of the perverse incentives built into the structure of social media itself. In an information economy, whoever can hold attention the longest gains the most, so it was inevitable that content that ignites users' emotions and causes they to continue browsing the longest was going to become the most popular.

Social media's ability to transfer huge amounts of information and quickly sort through and categorize it via algorithms is surely it's greatest utility for anyone who controls it. Having the ability to have a hundred million users post a black square (Willingham, 2020) must feel absolutely intoxicating to anyone who desires power. The ability to label and bury narratives as disinformation or conspiracy theories and then have veritable armies provide free labor defending these labels is inconceivable to the average user of these sites.



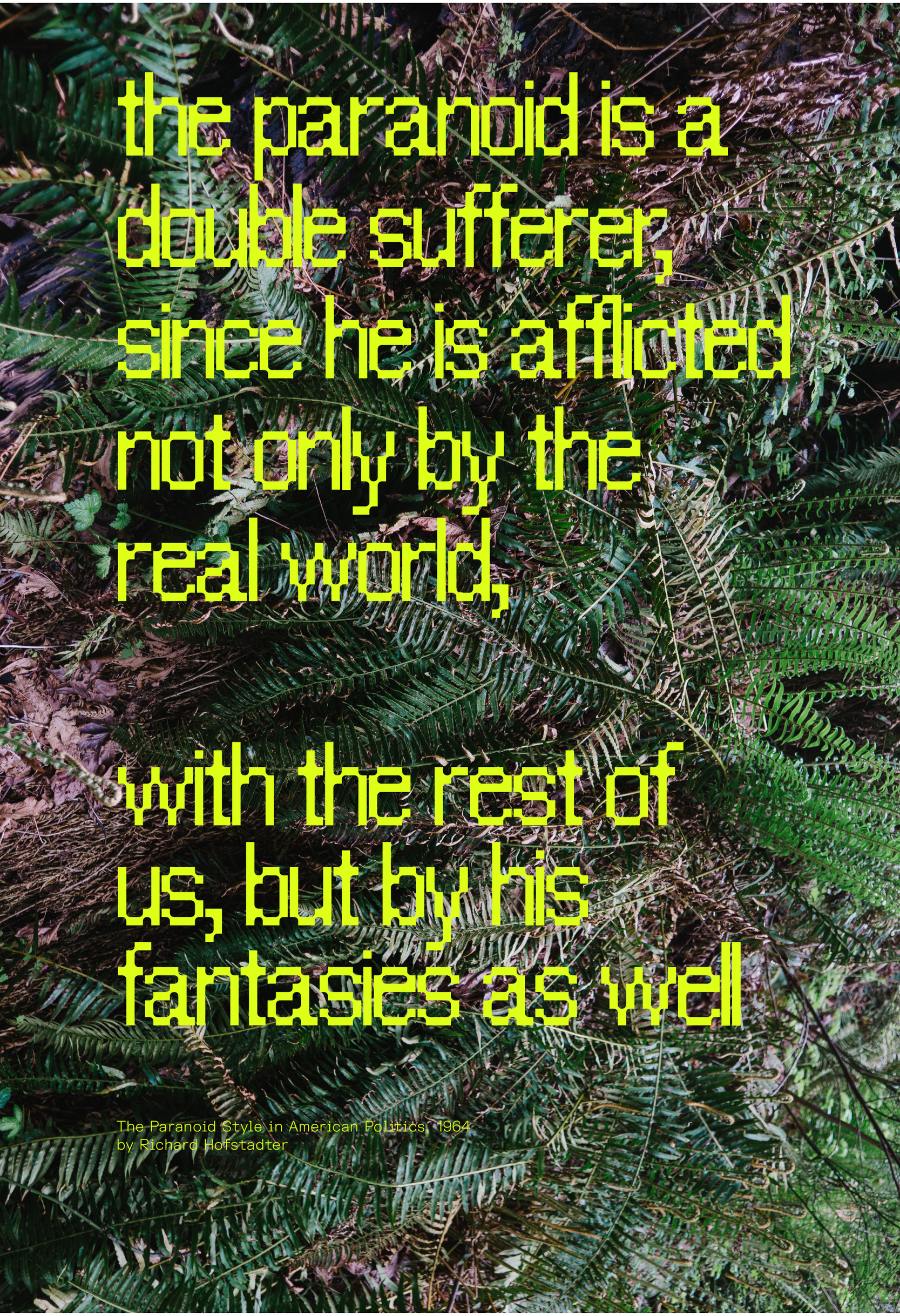
Michael Heizer next to Isolated Mass/
Circumflex , 1968 Photogrpahy by Tom Vinetz

"While I'm unconvinced social media will be humanities undoing, I have very little doubt that it be one of the tools used to sow the seeds of our destruction."

Social Media destroys people physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It is designed to reduce the user to an atom. Someone who becomes a singular individual totally alienated from everyone around them. Social media addiction causes physical and mental unwellness by destroying the retinas and attention spans of users. It commodifies users' identities and then sells them products to become their identity. As the long term effects of this media are becoming clearer to us I am not convinced anything will be done about them. They provide too much power and revenue to those who control them. From controlling the flow of information to designating what kind of information is legitimate on a global scale has resulted in a form of power and constraint never before seen in human history. While I'm unconvinced social media will be humanity's undoing, I have very little doubt that it be one of the tools used to sow the seeds of our destruction.

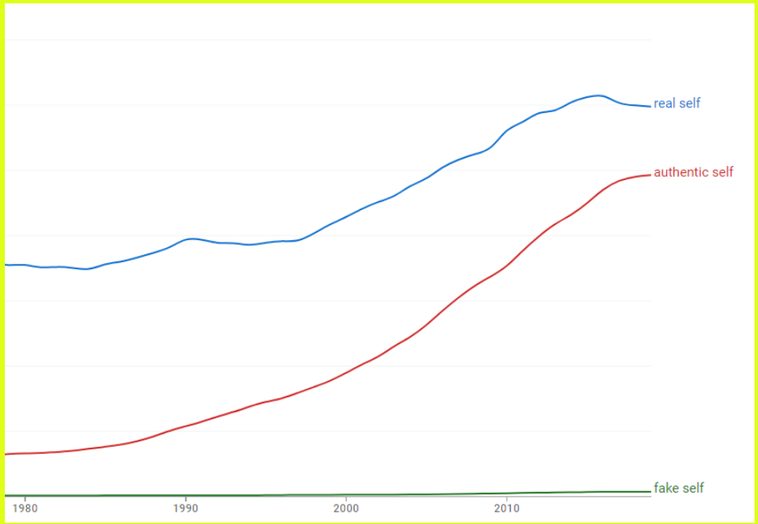
VOTF
Nr. 1 – Design thinking

Op-Ed



The Paranoid Style in American Politics, 1964
by Richard Hofstadter

While up until this point, we've discussed social media on a broad individual, relational level I.e., human to human or human to object, I'd like to elucidate and make as clear as possible the thinking that underpins this essay. The internet itself is as straightforward an example of Hyperreality (Baudrillard, 1994) as humanity has experienced up until now – a copy without an original. It allows the creation and recreation of as many facets of one's identity as they wish. I can pretend to be an academic on Twitter or a nuclear physicist on Reddit, a government agent on 4chan and so forth. Or, more pragmatically, the internet allows the tidy segmentation of one's identities and interests into neat little packages totally separate from another. I am a design enthusiast on Behance, a political commentator and cultural critic on Twitter, a fiction writer on Medium and Substack and so on and such as. This itself has allowed for an unprecedented level of self-discovery and exploration which can be clearly seen in the uptick in the frequency of terms like 'true self' (Google Books Ngram Viewer, 2019a) correlating with the rise of the internet.



Google Books Ngram viewer; instances of 'Real' and 'Authentic' self up until 2019

"social media enables is real time and instant creation of multiple facets of a user's identities – fractals of the self."

Social media is a potent and concentrated microcosm of the internet at large, and in fact likely the only aspect of the world wide web many interact with on a daily or weekly basis[7]. What social media enables is real time and instant creation of multiple facets of a user's identities – fractals of the self. When Baudrillard's explanation of the then-coming commodification of identity is considered (Baudrillard, 1987) – everyone's optimal programme which presents itself today readily in an extreme way; the true self can be understood as a kind of product for consumption. Think of the recent controversies in the UK with Tavistock and Mermaids wherein children were being exploited and turned into lifelong patients of the medical apparatus i.e. lifelong customers from which to extract capital from until they gracelessly expire, with little to no evidence that such extreme medical interventions were either necessary or provided any benefit (Evans, 2022). What this and the corresponding blowback by 'activists' is representative of is an incredible rise of the paradigmatic shift of self into the 'true self' a personal brand or identity that can be purchased and that one can never possibly achieve through natural means[8], such is the anxiety that marketing causes[9].

7 This has led to the rise of prescient 'conspiracy theories' like the dead internet theory (Tiffany, 2021) Leading liberal publications like the Atlantic will dismiss these ideas as nonsense while engaging in earnest with more ridiculous ideas like Russian interference in American elections (Foer, 2020) Despite these being clearly contradictory positions to advocate from (Either the internet is full of bots or it isn't) what is clear is that organs of the state apparatus are wholeheartedly invested in upholding the hegemony of their given state. And while the American state is delineated to an oftentimes individual level (Mier, 2022) i.e., there is no American Department of Sports, so Sha'Carri Richardson's use of drugs is never positioned as a systemic issue of the American State in the way that the Russian State's drug abuse is despite the fact that it's an open secret in professional athletics (Scottish Cyclist Graeme Obree infamously refused to join Team Great Britain due to them foisting EPO on him (Greechan, 2013)) that doping is widespread and encouraged (Davis, 2017). The American State constantly engages in contradictory policy and media communications to enforce this hegemony. In one breath, The Atlantic (an extension of the American State) denies that the internet is full of bots and the essence of 'dead internet theory' which is that the internet is a rotting zombie corpse and almost no one utilizes it fully or holistically while simultaneously pushing an idea that countries with GDPs a fraction the size of America are able to consistently and effectively engage in internet warfare via the extensive deployment of bots.

8 Or in any practical sense, Zizek in keeping with his thought tradition, expounds upon this point in his recent essay on 'wokeness' where he uses Lacanian psychoanalysis of the superego to support the idea that 'wokeness's is both on the decline and yet is here to stay because it is entrenching itself within a broader set of structural references, i.e. we have internalized 'wokenes.'. (2022) In both cases, discovering the 'true self' and escaping from one's racial guilt are impossible plateaus to summit as Zizek explains, "*The black woke elite is fully aware it won't achieve its declared goal of diminishing black oppression—and it doesn't even want that. What they really want is what they are achieving: a position of moral authority from which they may terrorize all others, without effectively changing social relations of domination.*" (2022) It appears the only pro-human solution to this conundrum is declaring that "I am not guilty of dominating others/ I am not guilty of desiring that which I am not".

See also Exodus 3:14

9 It's also worth noting the rise of the term 'narcissism' in tandem with 'real self' (Google Books Ngram Viewer, 2019b)

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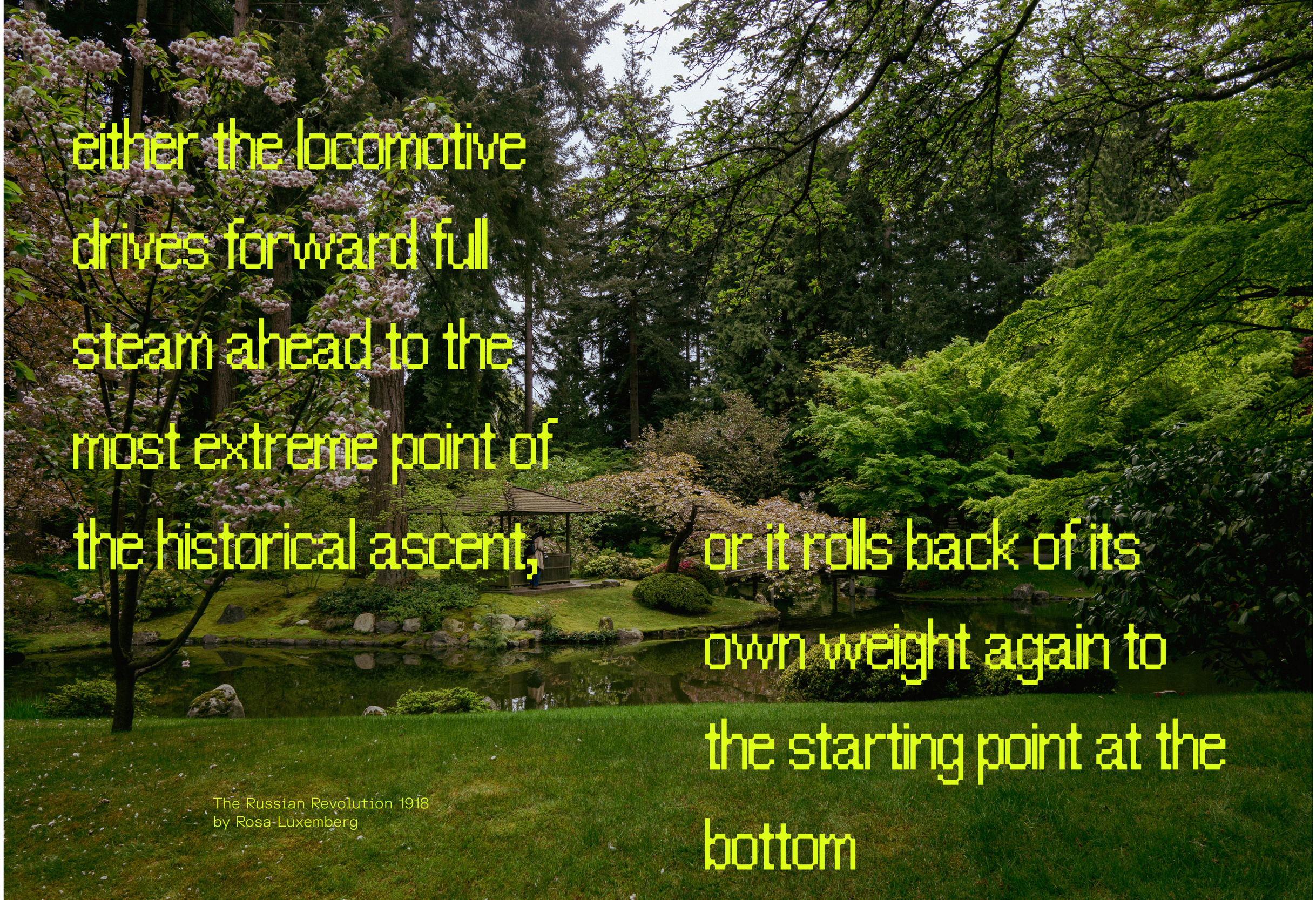
Op–Ed

either the locomotive drives forward full steam ahead to the most extreme point of the historical ascent,



or it rolls back of its own weight again to the starting point at the bottom

The Russian Revolution 1918
by Rosa-Luxemberg

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Op-Ed

The resulting effects of identity being reduced to a spreadsheet cell is that of the fractalled self, a person resembling a broken mirror where none of their affects intersect one another, they are themselves a series of islands drifting across the ocean subjected to the tides and erosion of time. This is until one aspect of a user's identity dominates and totalizes all others as is the case of the influencer who debases themselves to the point of being a walking advertisement. They are no longer human at this point but, a series of algorithmically driven pixels and strings of integers inhabiting a somatic mode.

This should be seen as the ongoing and consistent melding of man and technology. Technology is so present today that all aspects of our lives are under a form of technical surveillance that has completely replaced the social role communities once held. It is no longer disapproving church ladies chiding you for your behaviour but a faceless screen of thousands of your global peers reigning in your actions. Although in most cases rather than a jury of our peers it is an underpaid and vindictive petty tyrant eager to flex agency and power they think they possess[10]. Rodin's Thinker, the casting of a figure in a common medium of the time in which it was created is equally part of the Videodrome (Cronenberg, 1983) as anyone online today. Bronze is of the same temporality to the 1900s as a string of electronic symbols are today. The veritable retina of the mind's eye. (Cronenberg, 1983) This can be seen in the speed in which our references expire, take Angela Nagle's avant-garde and prescient book ' Kill All Normies' (2017) as an example of this. The underlying thesis was political polarization is driven in part due to the mediums in which it persists on currently due to plausible deniability and the proliferation of irony and post-irony built into these mediums as well as western culture at large. However, a mere 6 years later almost all of her references are completely outdated and thus the book is dismissed. The result being that Nagle has since been driven out of the contemporary left as a serious thinker.

10 Consider that parking tickets, rents and shoplifting are all mediated through a centralized technological structure (cameras or algorithms) owned by a state or corporation where these petty tyrants (who are themselves at risk of reprisals) are unable to do anything except carry out increasingly totalitarian policies on the general population.

Stills from Keiichi Matsuda's
HYPER-REALITY, 2016

"Technology is so present today that all aspects of our lives are under a form of technical surveillance that has completely replaced the social role communities once held."

This is why when the preeminent thinkers of our day claim fascism is on the rise, I am sympathetic to such a view. Although one must ask where is this perceived fascism coming from? This is where I am predictably disappointed when academics and journalists then go on to cite figures like Trump, Meloni, & Bolsonaro. It is not populists or unserious thinkers and personalities like Ben Shapiro and Jordan Peterson[11] who wish to dictate how we live, nor are these the people who dominate the everyday relations of our lives, these are not the people who 'control' the all-seeing communication systems that govern our every action[12]. These problems existed before them and will continue long after they are gone. We now exist at a point in time where inequality is the worst it has ever been (Collins, 2021), where we are surveilled constantly without reprieve, and it is somewhat ironic that the social media that subjugates us offers a form of salvation for the everyman.

Social media for those who can navigate it and have capacity to understand what they are seeing can be a lifeline for disruption. Like Eve and the snake this is not without consequences, absolute knowledge, and access to it is has long been written about as a terrible burden - itself an archetypal Western myth that exists to this day[13]. Man was cast out the of Eden for disobeying God and thrust into the unforgiving world, similarly social media can provide anyone with an accurate and real time understanding of world events if one can see reality for what it is and not what others tell them it is. The truth is the boulder Sisyphus rolled and social media operates as a kind of dualistic platform; it constrains and controls us in unprecedented ways while offering a lifeline for those who are able and willing to see it[14].

Stills from D-Fuse's
Secured by Design, 2012

11 Peterson himself is a particularly tragic case as he is representative of the decline of the Canadian academic; past generations had McLuhan, then McLuhan's simulation in Brian O'blivion (Cronenberg, 1983) and today Canadians have Peterson. In typical academic fashion the death of the humanities of which McLuhan and Peterson are both representative of has never been properly reckoned with and any acknowledgement of such an occurrence took at least ten years to materialize. (Heller,.2023)

12 It is true heads of state like Meloni, Trump and so on have a level of 'control' over these systems, but it should be painfully clear to anyone looking at Western democracies today that they do not operate as clear cut top down hierarchies. The American state reformulated itself and rebounded better than any other country in the world coming out of Covid-19 despite their ostensible head of state appearing to be senile and in severe cognitive decline. Additionally, when nation states perceive a threat they act like antibiotics to repel the infection, the very famous Time article detailed how the Americans achieved this in 2020 (Ball, 2021)

13 Variations of truth as a kind of forbidden knowledge exist in stories like the Allegory of the Cave, Faust, The Birth of Tragedy, and even contemporary children's literature like Lois Lowry's The Giver.

14 Analogs are often made to The Matrix and specifically the blue pill/ red pill scene in that social media can offer a user an unadulterated view into how events shape themselves in real-time (see January 6 live streams versus the media coverage after the fact, or for a domestic example the actual events of the Freedom Convoy vs the subsequent media coverage. I am obliged to believe that people who have now been proven correct (Stephens, 2022 & Subramanian and Kumar, 2021 & Mechoui, 2022) were racists and fascists for resisting the expansion of the biopolitical surveillance state? How short a memory do we have? A mere twenty years ago we were similarly ostracized for rejecting the war on terror and its related political trappings yet the exact people who were against Bush and Cheney's overreaches cheered fought and supported the same overreaches by politicians who didn't offend their aesthetic sensibilities.

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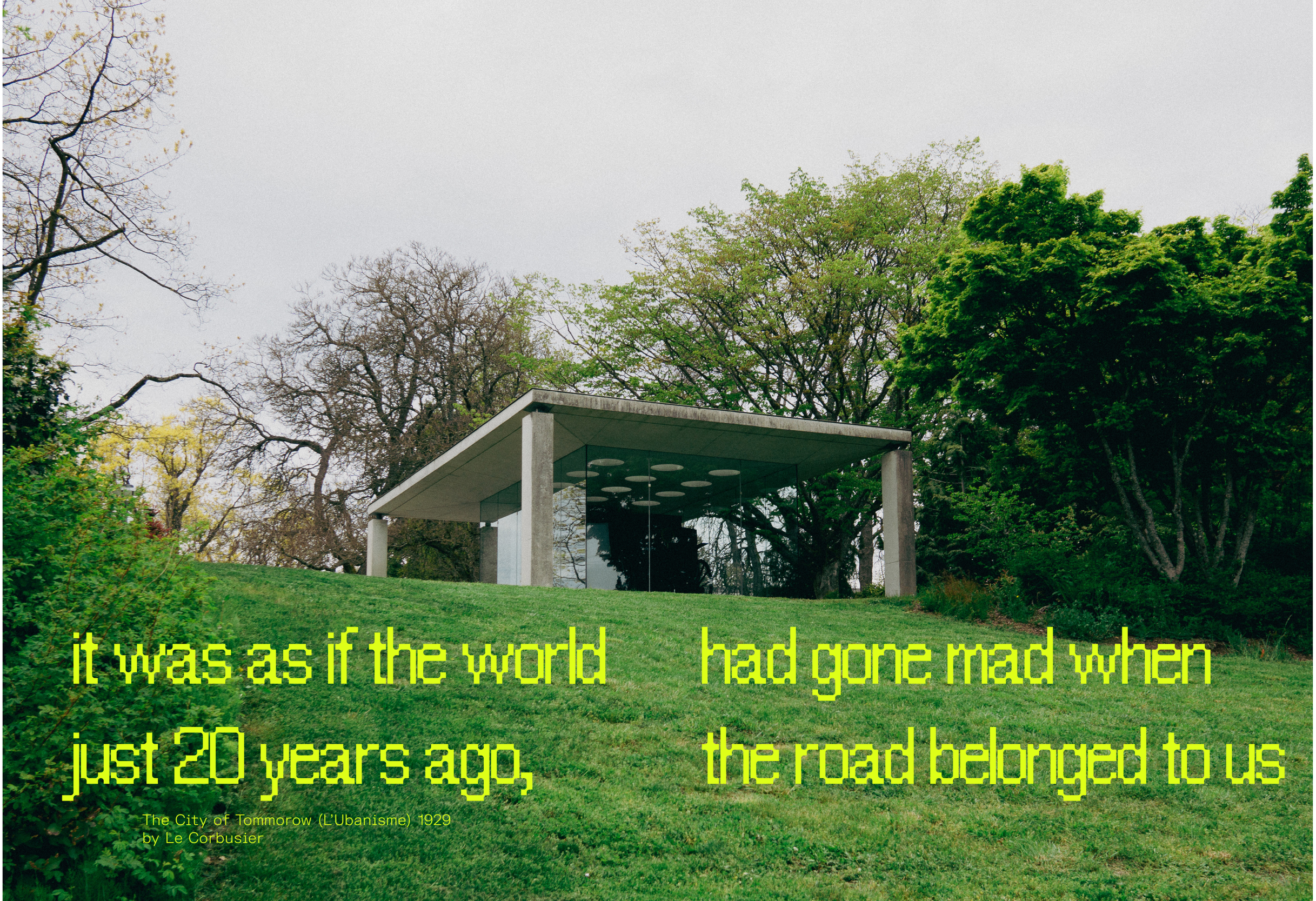

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This poses significant issues for the tenuous ideas surrounding disinformation and radicalization via social media. It is doubtless that political disruption, radicalization, and misinformation occurs most frequently on social media. Yes, misinformation and so on exists and are proliferated on social media; anyone denying this is totally out of touch with reality, that said prevailing mainstream thought simply does not and probably cannot understand the function by which this operates because it would undo too many load bearing myths for how society operates[15]. It is not through alternative mainstream outlets that radicalization occurs, it is through the constant and unending litany of contradictions from otherwise trustworthy outlets of conventional authority that drives radicalization. When someone can look at a real event in real-time with their own eyes and then turn on the evening news or in a more contemporaneous sense, read a Twitter thread or online news article from an otherwise 'trustworthy' or 'legitimate' source and have their own experience of the event totally contradicted and burked on a society wise level it tends to lead to negative perceptions about the prevailing trustworthiness and legitimacy of these sources. A glaringly obvious instance of this phenomenon is that PhD's were the most vaccine-hesitant group through the Covid-19 pandemic (Carnegie Mellon University, 2021) that this study was published during a point in time when personal research was being ridiculed and significant social pressures against its findings were in place (and similarily were utilized to quickly explain away the study's findings (McCreary, 2021) was somewhat anomalous, but fit into a recurring model of post-modern informational dissemination where it no longer pays to be correct, but rather it now pays to be correct at the right time and for the right reasons.

15 A recent Twitter thread (2023) posited that Ayn Rand was both the most overrated and 'worst' American author (decreed by the derision of academics and critics) and also the most influential writer in modern American history. What this points to is a larger and more immersive form of cultural censorship where people are dissuaded from consuming particular media because it is viewed as illegitimate, bad or most dystopianof all as 'debunked by experts'.

"it now pays to be correct at the right time and for the right reasons."

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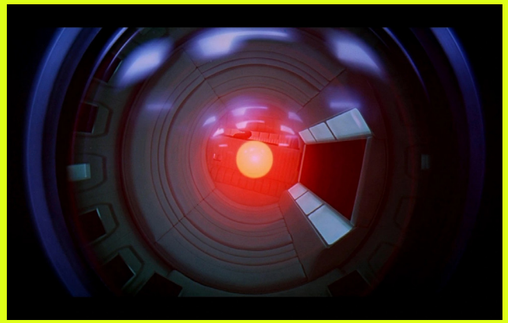
Op-Ed

"we are always in a state of exception"

Giorgio Agamben explains this as the constant and paradoxical state of exception[16]. (2005) That we are always in a state of exception, which requires the constant flaunting of the established order in the name of some amorphous and never-ending emergency. That those in power are allowed to constantly 'fail upwards' every time a proposed policy fails to deliver its stated results is an example of why those pursuing said policies should be given more power and more opportunities to act on this power. Meanwhile those who rule over us increasingly view us as dirt or cattle unworthy of political representation (Chandran, 2017) or, indeed life itself. (Anderssen and Walsh, 2023)

Essentially never-ending 'emergency powers' are granted to the state who then abuses them to subjugate its citizens. This is achieved through near-total control of every aspect of our everyday lives mediated through the advanced role in which technology operates within our life. When Phillips Electronics spoke of smart homes and camera's in the homes in the mid 1990s (Marzano, 1998) they hadn't even conceived of something as invasive of Amazon's Alexa or the perception that our phones now spy on us (Koetsier, 2019).

16 From Carl Schmitt's 'Ausnahmezustand'



HAL-9000 from 2001:A Space Odyssey, 1968 by Stanley Kubrick

It's ironic, really, that social media then provides such a lifeline to those who can access it; it is surely a lonely life for those who grasp the full extent of the biopolitical state[17] as it is mediated through its evident form, which is itself also social media. This kind of dualistic presentation as both saviour and oppressor is confounding yet understandable. Social Media is an extraordinarily powerful tool that theoretically is a normatively neutral platform capable of enacting incredible change for whoever controls it or can manipulate it as we saw throughout 2020 and the BLM protests. On the one hand, unfettered access to real-time information poses significant security and power risks to Western nation-states, on the other, heavy-handed censorship and overwrought control is contravenous to liberal notions of democracy and freedom unless through the management of social media it's possible to create the impression of organic desire.

Paul Klee
Angelus Novus, 1920

This is what is fundamentally behind the meltdown surrounding Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter. While there have been almost zero substantive changes to Twitter's policy decision and moderation (i.e. you will still get banned if you're hurling slurs at others) Musk is an unknown quantity, and his control of Twitter is viewed as the loss of an integral organ of the Western state media apparatus (also why so many prestige journalists are becoming refugees at Mastodon.) While Twitter was not free in any meaningful sense (Tabibi, 2022) it provided the simulation of a free and unmolested source of media that could be used to manufacture consent and further the interests of its owners. Somehow only now that it's owned by a billionaire who doesn't share an identical set of bourgeois liberal values, it is problematic[18].

17 Michel Foucault (Wilson,2008) Jean Baudrillard (Jones, 2007), and almost Mark Fisher (2013) were capable of leaving the Left-Wing Ghetto to make as Kierkegaard described 'the movement of infinite resignation' (a kind of leap of faith). They were subsequently reviled for this.

Additionally is is worth remembering Agamben's warning of the burning house.

18 It's worth remembering that Elon Musk runs a company that builds electric vehicles, is an atheist, and ostensibly worships liberal values.

Ilya Repin Arrest of a Propagandist, 1892

On a deeply spiritual and psychological level social media is the type of tool that would be written about in classical myths as the kind of object that could drive men into madness, to crash their boats on rocks or invite them to spend their entire lives staring into a mirror. It is obvious why governments and corporations are so desperate to control it as if it were a Pandora's Box of sorts. Despite the fact that it is wholly a simulation, we exist at a point in time where simulation and world building are more important than reality itself. We very much exist in a reality of our own creation as we pick and discard aspects of life, we find unappealing. A kind of deeply disturbing solipsistic existence which denies the agency or even appearance of any other human being. We are all the main character in the movie of our life. Despite the ever-increasing occurrences of Cassandra's[19] in our environments we appear to be blind to the consequences of such a totalizing piece of technology. Much like how Paglia claimed LSD was for her generation; conscious expanding yet destroyed the minds of a great many thinkers (Stackel and Paglia, 1994) Social media can be a repository of truth yet simultaneously it eviscerates the will and potential of millions living today

19 of Troy; (Anwari,2023)

ONE VERY IMPORTANT THOUGHT

Words by: Joseph Gleasure

Over the preceding 200 pages I have tried to explain not merely by logical inference but with foremost clarity of thought the issues plaguing design and more broadly the constraints placed upon our thought processes today. It is my sincere hope that anyone who happens across these visuals and text is provoked and incensed by the ideas proposed within this book. To ignore or castigate what has been explored thus far would be a grave error. It must be made clear that the prevailing order of things is slowly suffocating us, and all existing modes of thoughts and ideology do not come close to adequately describing our current predicament. More than one thinker has observed we have not yet learned to see our times, more than one thinker has observed that lazy or catastrophizing explanations such as 'capitalism', 'the climate crises' or 'fascism' are insufficient and obsolete. Rather, for Lyotard it was 'development' Baudrillard simply 'the system', and who's to say there is a key to the system? In any case it is clear that an answer to such a question is not to be found in the universities who are at present engaged in a kind of reverse Cognitive Behavior Therapy upon their ~~clients~~ students. A kind of nihilism generated from the need for job security and the oppression from true believers.

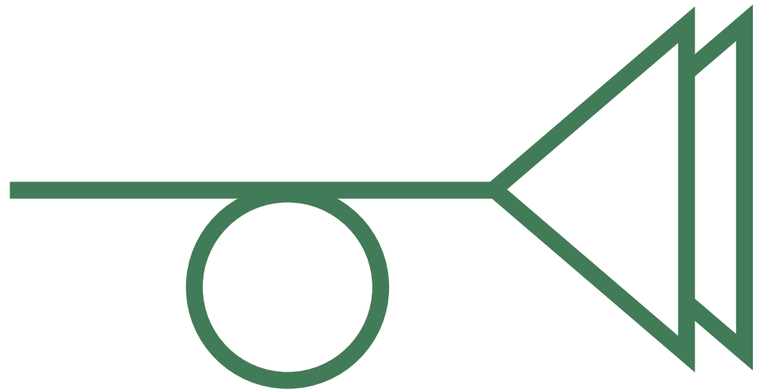
The pressures placed upon the individual by their relationships with themselves, their social groups, their professional, and political life are nothing short of soul crushing, To say we live in an unprecedented time is both tired and prophetic. Who knows what the future holds and I certainly don't propose an answer or frame for such an idea. However, one very important thought worth imparting upon the audience is that above anything else imagination must be kept alive. Some faint possibility of 'the system' changing must be kept alight in our minds. Else what are we living for?

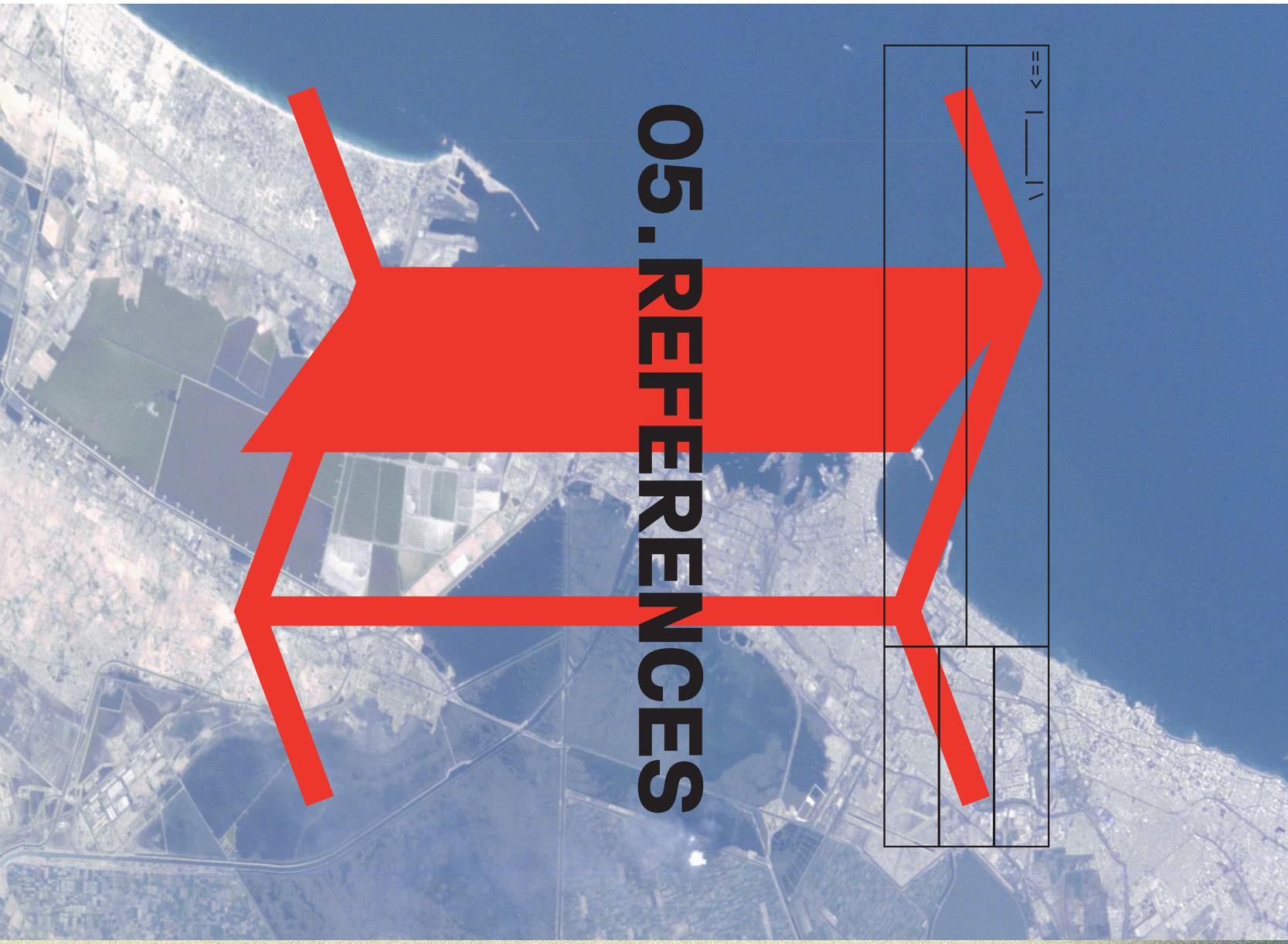
✱ From a distance, Mark Lombardi's beautiful, finely penciled drawings look like star charts. Up close, however, one sees that his perfect circles and networks of arcing lines connect points labeled with names like Oliver North, George Bush, Bill Clinton; many less famous businessmen, military men, politicians or crime figures, and organizations like the C.I.A., the Lippo Group or the World Finance Corporation.

Each drawing purports to diagram in dizzying detail the constellation of people and groups whose money and influence lie behind international scandals like the Iran-contra operation, Chinese government contributions to Mr. Clinton's presidential campaign or the collapse of savings and loan institutions.

Using only major news sources, Mr. Lombardi, who was an abstract painter until six years ago, integrates pieces of information that are unconnected in the minds of most citizens. As didactic instruments, the drawings are fascinating, as they profess to offer such intriguing revelations as the story of the televangelist Pat Robertson's acquisition of diamond and timber rights in Zaire.

But they are also compelling as works of art. The airy, precise webs expanding up to four or five feet across suggest an evil order underlying apparent chaos; like the novels of Thomas Pynchon or John le Carre, they exude a resonant poetry of paranoia. It's thrilling to contemplate the hidden, labyrinthine structures of real-world power that Mr. Lombardi so elegantly traces.





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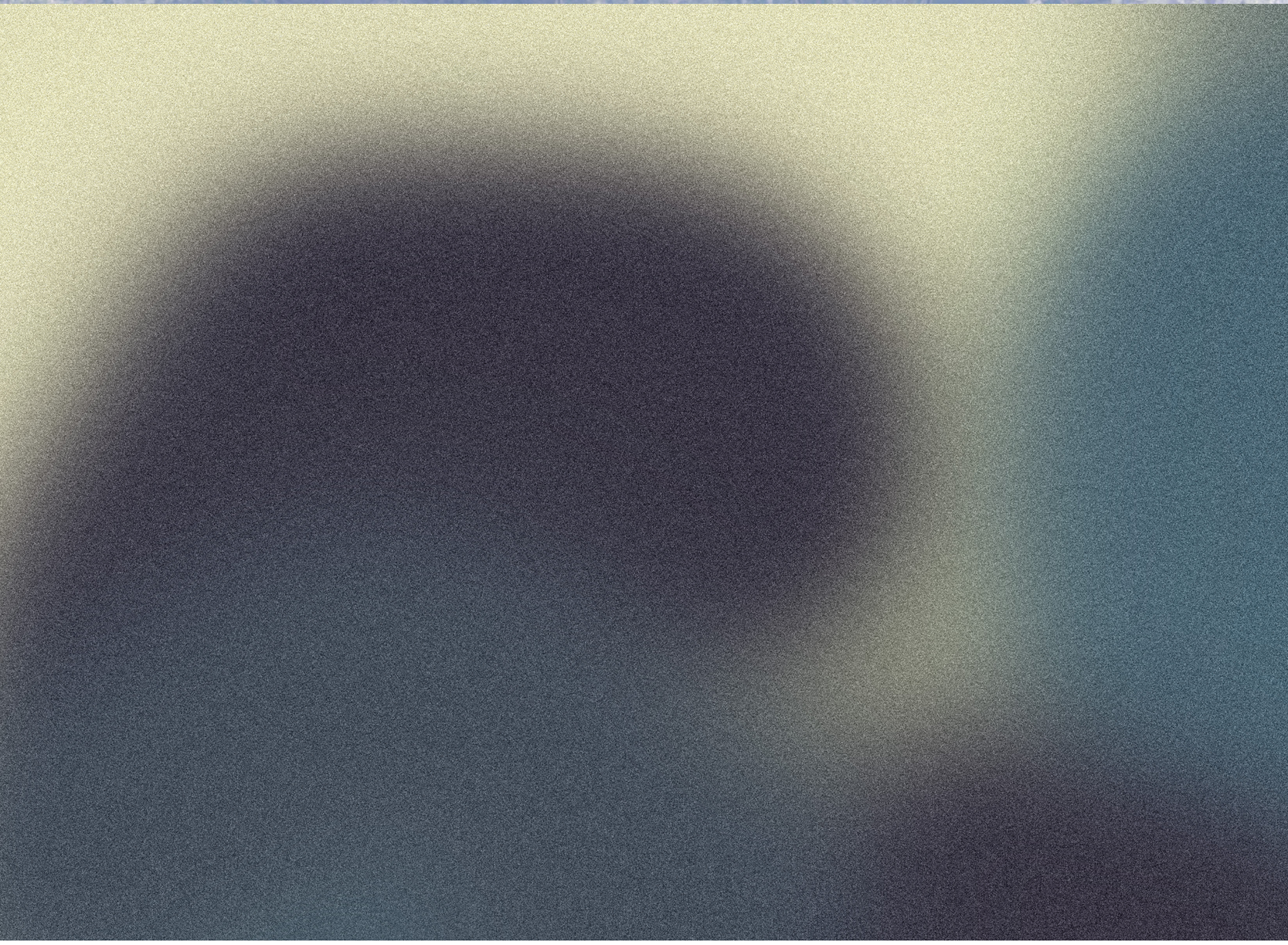

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